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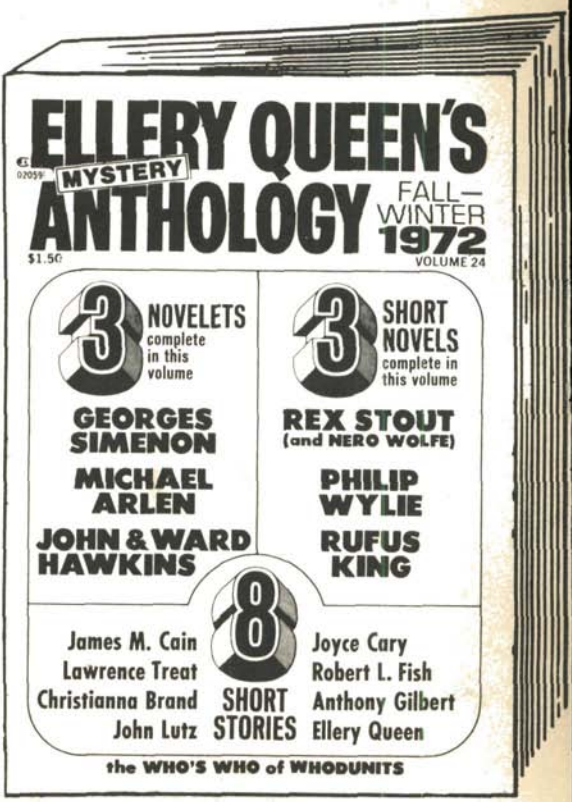

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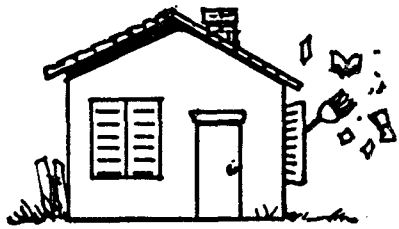

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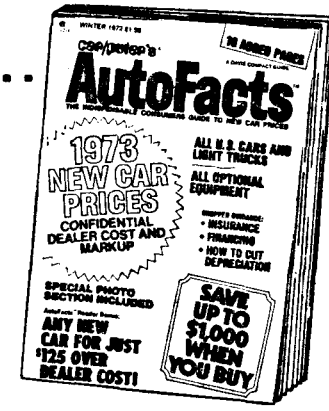

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a NEW Sir John Appleby story by

MICHAEL INNES

The memorial service for Christopher Brockbank, Q.C., who had died in an air disaster, was attended by family and dignitaries, the latter including Ministers of the Crown and the Lord Chief Justice. While the bishop was eulogizing the late Queen's Counsel, a strange event took place—perhaps the strangest event ever to occur during a memorial service of otherwise unflawed decorum.

You will find this new story about Sir John Appleby, retired Commissioner of Metropolitan Police, a case of what might be called macabre pertinacity. And as you might expect from Michael Innes, it is amusing, intelligent, sophisticated—in a phrase, "a civilized detective story". . .

THE MEMORIAL SERVICE

by MICHAEL INNES

In the fashionable church of St. Boniface in the Fields (mysteriously so named, since it was in the heart of London) a large and distinguished congregation was assembled to give thanks for the life of the late Christopher Brockbank, Q.C. The two newspaper reporters at the door, discreetly clad in unjournalistic black, had been busy receiving and recording all sorts of weighty names.

It was the sort of occasion on which sundry persons explained themselves as "representing" sundry other persons even more august than themselves or sundry institutions, corporations, charities, and learned bodies with which the deceased important individual had been associated.

Legal luminaries predominated. An acute observer (and there was at least one such present) might have remarked that a number of these did not settle in their pews, kneel, and bury their noses devoutly in their cupped hands without an exchange of glances in which a

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hint of whimsical humor fleetingly flickered. *All this for Chris Brockbank!* they appeared to be telling each other. *Just what would he have made of it?*

Sir John Appleby (our acute observer) was representing his successor as Commissioner of Metropolitan Police. For Brockbank long ago, and before he had transformed himself from a leading silk into a vigorous and somewhat eccentric legal reformer, had acknowledged his connections with Scotland Yard, and this fact had to be duly made known today.

Appleby possessed only a vague memory of the man, so that a certain artificiality attended his presence at the service. It hadn't seemed decent, however, to decline a request which was unlikely to occupy him for much more than 20 minutes—or 35 if one counted the time spent in scrambling into uniform and out again.

It would have been hard to tell that it wasn't something quite different—even a wedding—that was about to be transacted here. Gravity now and then there had to be, but on the whole a cheerful demeanor is held not improper on such occasions. The good fight had been fought, and there was nothing here for tears, nothing to wail or knock the breast. Six weeks had passed, moreover, since Christopher Brockbank's death, and anybody much stunned by grief had thus had a substantial period in which to recover.

Whether there had been many such—that is, those stunned by grief—appeared doubtful. Brockbank had been unmarried, and now the front pew reserved for relations was occupied only by two elderly women, habited in old-fashioned and no doubt frequently exhibited mourning, whom somebody had identified for Appleby in a whisper as cousins of the dead man. If anything, they seemed to be rather enjoying their role. It was to be conjectured that they owned some quite obscure, although genteel, situation in society.

The truth is, nobody had ever heard of any Brockbank until Christopher, Q.C. had come along. In some corner of the globe, Appleby vaguely understood, there was a brother, Adrian Brockbank, who had also distinguished himself—as a lone yachtsman, it seemed. But the wandering Adrian had not, apparently, hoisted himself into a jet for the occasion.

The congregation had got to its feet and was listening to the singing of a psalm. It was well worth listening to, since the

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words were striking in themselves and the choir of St. Boniface's was justly celebrated. The congregation was, of course, in the expectation of playing a somewhat passive part. At such services it is understood that there is to be comparatively little scope for what, in other context, would be called audience participation.

Appleby looked about him. It was impressive that the Lord Chief Justice had turned up, and that he was flanked by two Ministers of the Crown. There were also two or three socially prominent dowagers, who were perhaps recalling passages with Christopher when he had been young as well as gay: these glanced from time to time in benevolent amusement at the two old creatures in the front pew.

Among the clergy, and wearing a very plain but very golden pectoral cross, was a bishop who would presently ascend the pulpit and deliver a brief address. In the nave two elderly clubmen (as they ought probably to be called) of subdued raffish appearance were putting their heads together in muttered colloquy. These must connect with yet another aspect of the dead man's dead life: they were presumably laying a wager with one another on just how many minutes the eulogy would take.

The service proceeded with unflawed decorum. An anthem was sung. The bishop, ceremoniously conducted to his elevated perch, began his address. He lost no time in launching upon a character analysis of the late Queen's Counsel; it would have been possible to imagine an hourglass of the diminutive sort used to time the boiling of eggs as standing on the pulpit's edge beside him. The character analysis, although touching lightly once or twice on some endearing foible, was highly favorable in the main. The dead man, disposed in his private life to charity, humility, gentleness, and the study of English madrigals, had in his professional character been dedicated, stern, courageous, and passionately devoted to upholding, clarifying, and reforming his country's laws.

It was now that something slightly untoward occurred. A late arrival entered the church. An elderly man with a finely trimmed gray mustache, he was dressed with the exactest propriety for the occasion; that he was accustomed to such appearances was evident in the mere manner in which he contrived to carry a black silk hat, an umbrella, and a pair of

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gray kid gloves dexterously in his left hand while receiving from the hovering verger the printed service-sheet.

Not many of those present thought it becoming to turn their heads to see what was happening. But nobody, in fact, was cheated of a sight of the newcomer for long. He might have been expected (however accustomed to some position of prominence) to slip modestly into a pew near the west door. But this he did not do. He walked with quiet deliberation up the central aisle—very much (Appleby thought) as if he were an integral and expected part of the ritual which he was in fact indecorously troubling. He walked right up to the front pew and sat down beside Christopher Brockbank's female relatives.

There could be only one explanation. Here was the missing Adrian, brother of the dead man—to whom, indeed, in Appleby's recollection, he bore a strong family likeness. Perhaps the plane from Singapore or the Bahamas or wherever had been delayed; perhaps fog had caused it to be diverted from Heathrow to a more distant airport; thus rendered unavoidably tardy in his appearance, this much-traveled Brockbank had decided that he must afford a general indication of his presence, and move to the support of the ladies of the family, even at the cost of rendering an effect of considerable disturbance. It must have been, Appleby thought sympathetically, a difficult decision to make.

The bishop's eulogy went on. The new arrival listened with close attention to what must now be the tail end of it. And everybody else ought to have been doing the same thing.

But this was not so. The Lord Chief Justice had hastily removed one pair of spectacles, donned another, and directed on the fraternal appearance in the front pew the kind of gaze which for many years he had been accustomed to bring to bear on occupants of the dock at the Central Criminal Court. One of the Cabinet Ministers was looking frightened—which is something no Cabinet Minister should ever do.

Two of the dowagers were talking to one another in agitated and semi-audible whispers; a third appeared to be on the verge of hysterics. As for the bishop, he was so upset that he let the typescript of his carefully prepared allocution flutter to the floor below, with the result that he was promptly reduced to a peroration in terms of embarrassed improvisation.

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But before even this was concluded, the brother of the late Christopher Brockbank behaved very strangely. He stood up, moved into the aisle, and bowed. He bowed, not toward the altar (which would have been very proper in itself), but to the bishop in his pulpit (which wasn't proper at all). He then turned, and retreated as he had come. Only, whereas on arriving he had kept his eyes decently directed to the floor, on departing he bowed to right and left as he walked—much like a monarch withdrawing from an audience chamber through a double file of respectful courtiers.

He paused only once, and that was beside the uniformed Appleby, on whom he directed a keen but momentary glance, before politely handing Appleby his service-sheet. Then he resumed his stately progress down the aisle until he reached the church door and vanished.

Somebody would possibly have followed a man so patently deranged, and therefore conceivably a danger to himself or others, had not the Rector of St. Boniface's thought it expedient to come to the rescue of the flustered bishop by promptly embarking on the prayers which, together with a hymn, were to conclude the service. These prayers (which are full of tremendous things) it would have been indecent to disturb. But a hymn is only a hymn, and it was quite plain that numerous members of the congregation were giving utterance not to the somewhat jejune sentiments this prayer proposed, but to various expressions, delivered more or less *sotto voce*, of indignation and stupefaction.

Moreover, the Lord Chief Justice was gesturing. He was gesturing at Appleby in a positively threatening way which Appleby understood perfectly. If Appleby bolted from this untoward and unseemly incident instead of reacting to it in some policemanlike fashion he would pretty well be treated as in contempt of court. This was why he found himself standing on the pavement outside St. Boniface's a couple of minutes later.

"Get *into* this thing," the Lord Chief Justice said imperiously, and pointed to his Rolls-Royce. "You, too," he said to the Home Secretary (who was one of the Ministers who had been giving thanks for the life of the deceased Brockbank). "We can't let such an *outrage* pass."

"Outrage?" Appleby queried, as he resignedly sat down in the car. "Wasn't it simply that

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Christopher Brockbank's brother is mildly dotty—nothing more?"

"Adrian mildly dotty! Damn it, Appleby, didn't you realize what he was doing? He was *impersonating* Christopher—nothing else. The mustache, those clothes, his entire bearing—they weren't remotely Adrian. They were Christopher *tout court*. Didn't you notice the reaction of those who knew Christopher well? Both those Brockbank brothers were given to brutal and tasteless practical jokes, but this was the *most* brutal and tasteless of the lot."

"They may well have been. In fact, I seem to remember hearing something of the sort about them. But if Adrian judged it funny to get himself up like Christopher while attending Christopher's memorial service, that seems to me entirely his own affair. I shall be surprised, Pomfret, if you can tell me he has broken the law." Appleby smiled at the eminent judge. "Although, of course, it wouldn't do for me not to believe what you say."

"I don't believe it was Adrian at all. It was Christopher's ghost." The Home Secretary endeavored to offer this in a whimsical manner. It was he who had been looking patently frightened ten minutes before, and he was trying to carry this off lightly now. "To turn up as a ghost for something like one's own funeral is a joke good enough to gratify any purgatorial spirit, I'd suppose. What we've witnessed is the kind of thing those psychic chaps call a veridical phantasm of the dead."

"I haven't set eyes on Christopher Brockbank for thirty years," Appleby said, "and his wandering brother Adrian I've never seen before. You say this well-groomed person bowing himself down the aisle in that crazy fashion was *very* like Christopher?"

"Very."

"Thoroughly scandalous," Lord Pomfret said. "*Not* to be tolerated. Appleby, you *must* look into it."

"My dear Chief Justice, I have no standing in such matters. This uniform is merely ornamental. I'm retired, as you know."

"Come, come." The Home Secretary laid a hand on Appleby's arm in a manner designed as wholly humorous. "Do as you're told, my boy."

"Do you know—perhaps I will. The ghost, or whatever, did distinguish me a little, after all. He stopped and handed me this." Appleby was still holding a superfluous service-sheet. "It was almost as if he was passing me the ball."

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Much in the way of hard fact about Christopher Brockbank turned out not at all easy to come by. He proved to have been surprisingly wealthy. As the older of the two brothers he had inherited a substantial fortune, and to this he had added a second fortune earned at the Bar. Uninterested in becoming a judge, he had retired comparatively early, and for the greater part of the year lived in something like seclusion in the south of France. It was understood that this seclusion was in the interest of uninterrupted labor on a work of jurisprudence directed to some system of legal reform. The accident in which he had lost his life had been a large-scale air disaster in the Alpes-Maritimes. Surprisingly, for a Q.C., he had died intestate, and his affairs were going to take a good deal of clearing up.

It was on the strength of no more than this amount of common knowledge, together with only a modicum of private inquiry, that Appleby eventually called on a bank manager in the City. "I understand from an official source," Appleby began blandly, "that the late Mr. Brockbank kept his private account in this country at your branch."

"That is certainly true." The bank manager nodded amiably. He had very clear views, Appleby conjectured, on what information was confidential and what was not. "He used to spare a few minutes to chat with me on the occasion of his quite infrequent visits. A delightful man."

"No doubt. It has occurred to me that, in addition to keeping an account with you, he may have been in the habit of lodging documents and so forth for safekeeping."

"Ah."

"I know you maintain some sort of strongroom for such purposes and I suppose your customers can hire strongboxes of one convenient size or another?"

"Yes, indeed, Sir John. Should you yourself ever have occasion—"

"Thank you. Brockbank did this?"

"Sir John, may I say that, when inquiries of this sort are judged expedient for one reason or another, a request—and it can scarcely be more than a request—is commonly preferred by one of the Law Officers of the Crown?" The manager paused, and found that this produced no more than a composed nod. "But no doubt there is little point in being sticky in the matter. Let me consult my appropriate file." He unlocked a drawer and

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rummaged. "Yes," he said. "It would appear that Brockbank had such a box."

"His executors haven't yet inquired about it?"

"Seemingly not."

"I'd like you to open it and let me examine the contents."

"My dear Sir John!" The manager was genuinely scandalized. "You can't believe—"

"But only in the most superficial way. I have an officer waiting in your outer office who would simply turn over these documents unopened and apply a very simple test to the envelopes or whatever the outer coverings may prove to be. He will not take, and I shall not take, the slightest interest in their contents."

For a moment the manager's hand hovered over his telephone. An appeal to higher authority—perhaps to the awful authority of the General Manager himself—was plainly in his mind. Then he took a deep breath.

"Very well," he said. "I suppose an adequate discretion will be observed?"

"Oh, most decidedly," Appleby said.

"So that, for a start, is that," Appleby murmured to the Lord Chief Justice an hour later.

"But surely, my dear Appleby, he would scarcely recognize you at a glance? The years have been passing over us, after all."

"That is all too true. But the point isn't material. There I was, dressed up for that formal occasion in the uniform of a high-ranking officer of the Metropolitan Police. He felt he could trust me to tumble to the thing."

"And you are quite sure? *Absolutely* sure? The fingerprints on that service-sheet *were* identical?"

"Beyond a shadow of doubt. Christopher Brockbank always deposited or withdrew documents from that strongbox in the presence of an official of the bank who was in a position to identify him beyond question. The man who attended Christopher Brockbank's memorial service was Christopher Brockbank himself."

"And he *wanted* the fact to be known?"

"He wanted the fact to be known."

"It makes *no* sense."

"What it makes is very good *nonsense*. And there is one kind of nonsense that Brockbank is on record as having a fondness for—the kind of nonsense one calls a practical joke. And I expect he had money on it."

"Money!" Lord Pomfret was outraged.

"Say a wager with one of his own kidney."

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"We have been most *notoriously* abused." Something formidable had come into Pomfret's voice. One could almost imagine that high above his head in the chill London air the scales were trembling in the hand of the blindfolded figure of Justice which crowns the Central Criminal Court.

"I wouldn't deny it for a moment. But I come back to a point I've made before. You can't send a man down, Chief Justice, for attending his own memorial service. It just isn't a crime."

"But there must be *something* very like a crime in the hinterland of this impertinent buffoonery." Lord Pomfret had flushed darkly. "Steps have been taken to certify as dead a man who isn't dead at all."

"In a foreign country, and in the context of some hideous and, no doubt, vastly confused air crash. Possibly without any actual knowledge of the thing on Brockbank's own part. Possibly as a consequence of innocent error—error on top of which he has merely piled an audacious joke. A singularly tasteless joke, perhaps, but not one with jail at the end of it."

"We can get him. We can get him for *something*."

"I don't know what to make of that from a legal point of view." The retired Commissioner of Police made no bones about glancing at the Lord Chief Justice of England in frank amusement. "And there will be a good deal of laughter in court, wouldn't you say?"

"You're damn well *right!*" Not altogether unexpectedly, Lord Pomfret was suddenly laughing himself. "But what the devil is he going to do *now?* Just how is he proposing to come alive again?"

"With great respect, m'lud, I suggest your lordship is in some confusion." Appleby, watching his august interlocutor dive for a whiskey decanter and a siphon, was laughing, too. "Christopher Brockbank *is* alive. He's in a position, so to speak, in which no further action is necessary."

"Nor from us either? We *leave* him to it?"

"That I wouldn't say." Appleby was grave again. "I confess to being a little uneasy about the whole affair."

"The deuce you do!" Now on his feet, the Lord Chief Justice held the decanter poised in air. "Say when."

"Only a finger," Appleby said. "And I'll continue to look into the thing."

"With *discretion*, my dear fellow." Pomfret was suddenly almost like the bank manager.

"Oh, most decidedly," Appleby said.

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Retired Police Commissioners don't go fossicking in France, and through the courtesy of his successor, Appleby received reports in due season. Hard on the air crash an elderly and distressed English gentleman had appeared on the scene of the disaster in a chauffeur-driven car. Presenting himself to the *chef de gendarmerie* who was in control of the rescue operations, he had explained that he was Adrian Brockbank, and that he had motored straight from Nice on hearing of the accident, since he had reason to suppose that his older brother, Mr. Christopher Brockbank, Q.C., had been on board the ill-fated plane. Could he be given any information about this?

It was explained to Mr. Adrian Brockbank that much confusion inevitably prevailed; that, as often happened on such sad occasions, there was no assurance that an entirely reliable list of passengers' names existed; and that certain necessarily painful and distressing attempts at identification were even then going on. Would Mr. Adrian Brockbank care to . . .?

The inquirer steeled himself, and cared. Eventually he had been almost irrationally reluctant to admit the sad truth. A ring on the charred finger of one of the grim exhibits he had, indeed, formally deposed as being his brother's ring. But it seemed so tiny a piece of evidence! Might there not be more? A relevant article of baggage, perhaps, that had in part escaped the heat of the conflagration?

Not at the moment, it was explained to Mr. Adrian Brockbank. But something of that kind might yet turn up. As so often happened, debris was probably scattered over a very wide area. There was to be a systematic search at first light. With this information Mr. Adrian Brockbank and his chauffeur had departed to a nearby hotel for the night. And in the morning the somber expectation had been fulfilled.

Christopher Brockbank's brief case had been discovered, along with other detritus, in a field nearly a quarter of a mile away; and it contained a number of recent personal papers as well as Christopher's passport. Whereupon Adrian, formally identifying himself by producing his own passport and the testimony of his chauffeur, satisified the requirements of French law by making a deposition before a magistrate. After that he made decent arrangements for the disposal of what could be called his brother's remains and then departed as he had come.

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Such had been the report on the highly unsatisfactory death of Christopher Brockbank, Q.C.

All this, Appleby told himself, didn't remain exactly obscure once you took a straight look at it. Just as it wasn't Adrian who had turned up at the memorial service, so it hadn't been Adrian who had turned up at the grisly aftermath of that aerial holocaust. It had been Christopher on both occasions—and it was impossible to say that throughout the whole affair Adrian had played any positive role at all.

This was bizarre—but there was something that was mildly alarming as well. Christopher had *waited*. Equipped with a passport in the name of his brother, equipped no doubt with a passport in his own name, equipped with the brief case which he would eventually toss into an appropriate field—equipped with all this, Christopher had waited for a sufficiently substantial disaster within, say, a couple of hours' hard motoring of his French residence. He had certainly had to wait for months, more probably for years. A thoroughly macabre pertinacity had marked the attaining of his practical joke.

And hadn't the joker overreached himself? Could any place in society remain for a man who, with merely frivolous intent, had deliberately identified an unknown dead body as his own? It seemed not surprising that Christopher hadn't been heard of again since he had walked down that aisle, graciously bowing to a bewildered congregation. Perhaps he had very understandably lost his nerve.

But even if Adrian didn't come into the story at all, where was Adrian? He was almost certainly Christopher's heir, and yet even Christopher's English solicitors appeared to know nothing of his whereabouts. Perhaps they were just being more successfully cagey than that bank manager. Certainly they had, for the moment, nothing to say—except that Mr. Adrian Brockbank spent most of his time sailing the seven seas.

Appleby was coming to feel, not very rationally, that time was important. He had told Lord Pomfret he was uneasy—which had been injudicious, since he couldn't have explained why. Pomfret, however, had refrained from questioning him. And now he had the same uneasy feeling.

No Brockbank had died. But two Brockbanks might be described as lying low. There was about this the effect of an ominous lull.

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And then Christopher Brockbank turned up.

He turned up on Appleby's urban doorstep and was shown in—looking precisely like the man who had put on the turn in St. Boniface's.

"My dear Appleby," he said, "I have ventured to call for the purpose of offering you an apology." Brockbank's address was easy and familiar; he might have been talking to someone he ran into every second week in one club or another.

"I don't need an apology. But I could do with an explanation."

"Ah, that—yes, indeed. But the apology must come first—for dragging you into the little joke. It started up in my mind like a creation, you know, just as I was walking out of that church. There on the service-sheet were my fingerprints, and there were you, who if handed the thing could be trusted to do as I have no doubt you have done. A sublimely simple way of proving I was still in the land of the living."

"I am delighted you are still with us." Appleby said this on a note of distinguishable irony. "And I accept your apology. And now, may the explanation of the little joke follow?"

"The explanation is that it has been designed as rather more than a little joke. My idea has been, in fact, to make a real impact on the complacency of some who are satisfied with the absurd inadequacy of many of our laws. That old fool Pomfret, for example. After all, I have been a legal reformer for some time."

"I see." Appleby really did see. "This exploit has been in the interest of highlighting the fact, or contention, that the law is hazardously lax as to adequately verifying the identity of deceased persons—that sort of thing?"

"Precisely that sort of thing. I shall have established—strikingly because of my ingenious prank—that in France and England alike—"

"Quite so, Mr. Brockbank. We need not linger on the worth of your intentions. But surely you have reflected of late on the extent to which you are likely to be in trouble, under French legal jurisdiction, if not under English? The deception you carried out on the occasion of that air disaster—"

"My dear Appleby, what can you be thinking of? That was my brother Adrian, was it not? This all begins from his proposing to bring off a better joke against *me* than I ever brought off against *him*. It is on the record, I suppose, that we have both rather gone in for

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that sort of thing. He was going to confront me with the pleasant position of my being legally dead. Well, I capped his joke by, you may say, concurring. I attended—I hope in a suitably devout manner—my own funeral and my own memorial service. So the laugh is going to be on him."

"Mr. Brockbank, I have seldom come across so impudent an imposture!" Appleby suddenly found himself as outraged as the Lord Chief Justice had been. "Whether your brother has, or has not, been remotely involved in this freakish and indecent affair I do not know. But I *do* know that six weeks ago in France you presented yourself as that brother on an occasion at which such clowning would have been wholly inconceivable"—Appleby paused, then took a calculated plunge—"to anybody bearing the character of a gentleman."

"I withdraw my apology." Christopher Brockbank had gone extremely pale. "As for what you allege—prove it. Or get somebody with a legitimate concern in my affairs to prove it. *You* have none."

"Then I scarcely see why you should be calling on me—except to discover how far I have penetrated to the truth of this nonsense. I am prepared to believe that you had some serious intention in the way of exposing the weakness of certain legal processes. I accept that notions of what is permissibly funny may differ as between one generation, or one coterie, and another. But your present pack of lies about the conduct of your own brother—lies which I must now suppose you are intending to make public—is a little too steep for me. Just what are you going to say to your brother when you meet?"

"I haven't decided yet. But I must do so, since I am on the point of running down to see him now."

"I beg your pardon?" Appleby stared incredulously at his visitor.

"I said I'm off to see Adrian. I must persuade him I'm not as dead as he has tried to represent me. In a way, he doesn't know that he has not, so to speak, liquidated me quite successfully. More than six weeks have gone by since his little turn over my supposed body and I haven't—so far as he knows—given a chirp. That must be puzzling him, wouldn't you say?"

"Possibly. Do I understand that your only public appearance has been at that deplorable memorial service?"

"Yes, it has. You may

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simply take it that it has amused me to lie low."

"You appear to me to be in love with your own mortality. Now more than ever it seems rich to die—that sort of thing. What if there's a general feeling, Mr. Brockbank, that your decease was a welcome event? You might have quite a task persuading a malicious world that you *are* alive; that you are *you*, in fact, and not some species of Tichborne Claimant."

"Ah, that's where those fingerprints come in. It's hardly a piece of evidence a conscientious policeman could suppress, eh?"

"No, it is not." Appleby was becoming impatient with this senseless conversation. "If your brother Adrian really played that trick at the scene of the disaster—which I do not believe for a moment—he will be gratified to learn that you have taken the consequences of his joke so seriously as to register your continued existence with the police."

"But I won't tell him what I did with that service-sheet." Christopher Brockbank gave a cunning chuckle. "Not till I'm sure he hasn't some further joke up his sleeve." He got to his feet. "And now I must be off on my brotherly visit."

"Far be it from me to detain you. But may I ask, Mr. Brockbank, where your brother is to be found?"

"Ah, that will doubtless become public property quite soon. Adrian is a minor celebrity in his way. But, just at the moment, I think I'll keep his whereabouts to myself."

The prediction proved accurate. The very next morning's papers carried the news that Adrian Brockbank's yacht had been sighted at anchor off Budleigh Salterton in Devon. It seemed probable that he had arrived unobtrusively in home waters several days earlier.

Appleby endeavored to absorb this as information of only moderate interest. Christopher Brockbank had had his practical joke, and it had involved a breach of the law in France if not in England. He had now gone off to join his nautical brother Adrian and crow over the manner in which he had taken Adrian's identity on himself at the inception of the imposture in the Alpes-Maritimes. Something like that must really be what was in Christopher's mind. And it was all very far from being Appleby's business; he ought to be indifferent as to whether those two professional jokers (as they appeared to have been) decided to laugh or quarrel over the thing. Let them fight it out.

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But this line of thought didn't work. Several times in the course of the morning there came back into Appleby's head one particular statement that Christopher had made. It was a statement which just *might* be fraught with a consequence not pretty to think of. At noon Appleby got out his car and drove west.

Budleigh Salterton proved not to have a harbor. A few unimpressive craft were drawn up on a pebbly beach; far away on the horizon tankers and freighters plowed up and down the English Channel. The sea was otherwise empty except for a single yacht riding at anchor rather far out.

Binoculars didn't help to make anything of this. Where one might have expected to read the vessel's name a tarpaulin or small sail had been spread as if to dry. Appleby appealed to a bystander.

"Do you happen to know," he asked, "whose yacht that is?"

"I haven't any idea." The man addressed, although he appeared to be a resident of the place, was plainly without any nautical interest. "It has been here for some days—except that it went out at dusk yesterday evening and I happened to see it return at dawn this morning. But I did hear somebody say there was a rumor the fellow was one of those lone yachtsman types."

"Do you know where I can hire a rowboat?"

"Just down by that groyne, I believe."

"Thank you very much."

"May I come on aboard?" Appleby called out. Adrian Brockbank was very like his brother, even down to the neat gray mustache.

"Not if you're another of those infernal reporters."

"I'm not. I'm an infernal policeman. A retired one."

"You can come up if you like." And Adrian tossed down a small accommodation ladder. He had appeared only momentarily startled.

"Thank you." Appleby climbed and settled himself without ceremony on the gunwale. "Have you had any other visitors lately, Mr. Brockbank?"

"I see you know my name. Only a reporter, as I said. That was yesterday evening. But I persuaded him to clear out."

"What about your brother?"

"I beg your pardon?" Adrian stared.

"Your brother Christopher."

"Good God, Mr.—"

"Appleby. Sir John Appleby. Yes?"

"My brother Christopher

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was killed six weeks ago in an air crash. Your question is either ignorant or outrageous."

"That remains to be proved, sir. And I gather you have been on some extended cruise or other. Just how did you hear this sad news?"

"*Hear* it? Heaven and earth, man! It was I who actually identified Christopher's body. I'd sailed into Nice and tried to reach him by telephone. They said he was believed to have taken a plane for Paris. Then suddenly there was the news of this—"

"So you identified the body, made certain decent arrangements about it, and then went to sea again. Is that right?"

"It is right. But I'm damned if I know what entitles you—"

"And then, only a few days ago, there was your brother's memorial service at St. Boniface's in London. Do you say you attended it?"

"Certainly I attended it. But as I'd only just berthed here and had to get hold of the right clothes, I was a bit late for the occasion."

"I see. Then you came straight back here?"

"Obviously I did. I don't like fuss. I've been lying low."

"That's something that appears to run in your family. And so, very decidedly, does something else."

"May I ask what that is?" Adrian was now eyeing Appleby narrowly.

"A rash fondness for ingenious but quite vulnerable lies. Mr Brockbank, your brother Christopher, having somehow got wind of your arrival here at Budleigh, came down yesterday evening and—I don't doubt—rowed out to see you just as I have done. It was something quite out of the blue. I don't know where you've come from, but you certainly haven't been receiving English news on the way. And here, suddenly, was your brother, chock-full of the craziest of his practical jokes. He'd resolved to attend his own memorial service, partly for the sheer hell of it, and partly to dramatize what he considered some sort of loophole in the law. He'd plotted the thing ingeniously enough, and it had involved his impersonating you at the scene of an air crash. He told you all this in exuberant detail. *You* had been made to appear the practical joker—this was the best part of *his* joke—and as a result he was offically dead until he chose to come alive again."

Appleby paused. "Mr. Brockbank," he went on quietly, "you decided that he never *would* so choose."

"This is the most outrageous—"

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"Please don't interrupt. What you said to yourself was this: if Christopher wanted to be dead, let him damned well *be* dead—and let his large fortune pass to his next of kin, yourself. It was all so simple, was it not? Lie Number One: *you* had sworn to the identity of the dead man. Lie Number Two: *you* had been just in time for the memorial service. Your story would be simple and plausible. The true story, supposing anybody should tumble to it, would be too fantastic to be believed. Have I succeeded in stating the matter with some succinctness? And accuracy?"

"You have a kind of professional glibness, Sir John." Adrian said this coolly. "I suppose that for most of your days you've been concocting yarns like this. But it won't wash, you know—it won't wash at all. You are reckoning that, at every step, it will be possible to collect some scrap of circumstantial evidence against me, and that these will add up. But they won't—not to anything like the total that would persuade a jury of such nonsense. My poor brother met an accidental death in France and I identified his body—and that's that."

"On the contrary, your brother was murdered by you on this yacht yesterday evening—doubtless sewed up in canvas along with whatever miscellaneous heavy metal objects you could find on board—and thrown over the side, far out at sea, last night."

"Far out at sea?" Adrian repeated the words ironically. "Awkward, that. A body is rather a useful exhibit, is it not, when a thin case has to be proved?"

"Mr. Brockbank, you entirely mistake the matter. There is absolute proof that your brother Christopher, alive and well, attended his own memorial service. It is a proof which, I know, he proposed to withhold from you for a time—which was a pity. But the evidence, which I need not particularize, is safely in my possession."

"Dear me!" Adrian made a casual gesture which somehow didn't match his suddenly alert look and tautened frame. "And is this evidence in the possession of anybody else?"

"Yes, of several people. Otherwise, I'm bound to say, I shouldn't be here alone with you, Mr. Brockbank, in this secluded situation. But it hasn't, I repeat, been evidence in *your* possession. For it wasn't in your brother's mind to mention its existence to you just at present. He was keeping it up *his* sleeve in case you

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proved to have something further up *your* sleeve. Rather a muzzy notion, perhaps, but understandable when Brockbank is sparring with Brockbank. It is evidence, incidentally, which was entirely and ingeniously devised by your brother himself."

Appleby paused. "I may just say that his fingerprints come into it. Irrefutable things, you know."

There was a long silence, and then Adrian Brockbank, who had also been perched on a gunwale, stood up.

"If I may slip below for a moment," he said, "I think I can turn up something which will put an end to this whole absurd affair."

"As you please," said Appleby.

It was only after another pause that Appleby had spoken. He might have been staring with interest at some small smudge of smoke on the horizon. For a couple of long minutes he continued immobile, somberly waiting. For a further minute he continued to wait—even after the revolver shot had rung out.

Then Appleby rose with a small sigh and sought the late Adrian Brockbank below.

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a *NEW* short-short by

NEDRA TYRE

"You're not interested in valuables. What you're after is my life"...

LOCKS WON'T KEEP YOU OUT

by NEDRA TYRE

Leave me alone.

Terror of you paralyzes me, nails me to the threshold. My hands hesitate to open a door. I'm afraid you're on the other side.

I can't sleep. After short troubled naps I wake with the sensation you've been hovering over me. These last few days I've convinced myself it's safe to walk only when the sun is shining so I'll be warned of your presence by your shadow.

I don't go to museums any more. They have too many dark and secluded nooks where you could find me.

My concert tickets go unused; in the darkened auditorium when the music reaches a crescendo you could easily crush out my life while my shouts of protest are drowned by the percussion instruments.

My mail goes unanswered and I refuse invitations. I've lied out of attending committee meetings, pretending that minor illnesses keep me from dinners and parties.

I've never been a coward—what had to be faced I faced. Yet I can't face your malice.

Perhaps you're enraged because I have ignored you. No, ignored is too strong a word. Disdained would be a more accurate way of putting it. I suppose I do have some of Aunt Carrie's arrogance. She wasn't a snob. She just had a way of walking straight past some people without seeing them—she didn't seem to know they were there. I honestly didn't know you were there. I couldn't believe it when you began to threaten me. When I realized your intentions were deadly, that it was my life you were after, I refused to believe it. I called myself an imaginative fool.

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Why I despise you most of all—rather, why I despise my fear of you most of all—is that my fear makes me oblivious of everything else. I don't even notice the weather. I have loved weather, no matter what form it takes. Its ridiculous caprices that can begin a morning at 20 degrees and a few hours later have the thermometer soaring to summer heat—those caprices have delighted me. Hot. Cold. No extreme mattered. I responded to it all with joy.

Now I don't pay any attention to the weather, and since I don't notice its vagaries the weather has turned into my enemy. I find myself shivering, not having put on warm enough clothing. I plunge into rain without an umbrella or sink ankle-deep in puddles without my boots.

One day my fear of you made me panic and I telephoned the police for protection. My damsel-in-distress, ladylike trills had an immediate effect. Within minutes a policeman arrived at my door.

But I had no crime to report, only your vague threats. I began to apologize for having summoned the policeman on a fool's errand. Immediately he reassured me. I had reason to be afraid, he insisted, as he looked around at the paintings and the silver. He hoped I had good locks. And surely I wasn't ever foolish enough to let anyone enter whom I didn't know.

If only I could tempt you with the things I've accumulated, appease you with a minor Gauguin or a George III silver beaker.

The policeman went around appraising the security, suggesting a stronger lock here and there.

Locks won't keep you out. You're not interested in valuables. What you're after is my life. I'm positive of that. Yet never before have I felt the inevitability of anything; life has always offered many paths and one could easily retreat from a path already begun. Trips to be taken always held as many choices as there were air routes and if one residence didn't prove satisfactory there were dozens of houses and apartments—a planetful of locations—to select from. A jewel could be recut and reset and a joyless love affair ended. To be pleased was only a matter of making another and wiser choice.

But there is no choice now.

The paths have all converged and they lead straight to you. They lead to my death from you.

If only these last days were free of dread and the short time remaining to me were not

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ruined by constant apprehension. I should have thought that when one knows she is looking on something for the last time it would be with a heightened response. Flowers are blooming—roses and lilies-of-the-valley are bursting with beauty and fragrance. The shelves are heavy with books I've promised myself the pleasure of reading again.

But the flowers might as well be rank and the books printed in Sanskrit for all the delight they will ever give me.

It isn't as if I haven't made preparations for death. My last will and testament has been sensibly drawn. My daughter is well provided for; *objets d'art* are to go to museums; and there are legacies and keepsakes for my friends.

I detest myself for this cowardly preoccupation with my annihilation. Newspapers and TV and the radio should have hardened us all to death—hundreds dashed to death in tornadoes shown on the TV shortly before dinner, thousands demolished in a tidal wave in the paper read with the morning coffee, unnumbered victims crushed in earthquakes announced on the radio as one sips a cocktail before lunch.

Death and danger are everywhere and much closer home than the announced tragedy delivered with the morning paper along with the advertisements of month-end clearance sales or reported on TV between the detergent commercials. There can be a car out of control only a block away or a fire can devour a house on the next street.

But all those tragedies are dealt by destiny impersonally and without malice.

There's nothing impersonal in your malice toward me.

Please—I beg you—leave me alone. I was a dutiful child. I obeyed my parents. I was polite to my elders. I was a loving wife and a conscientious mother. I've been a citizen committed to good causes.

Only listen to that—you have me whining—I've been degraded by you. I'm trying to cash in my chits of good behavior. I'm sniveling for mercy, sucking up to you for leniency.

The telephone is ringing. I'm not going to answer it. I know it's you. I know what you'll say.

The ringing goes on and on and on. Finally it stops. After a while there's a harsh knock on the door. Then two hands are pounding. The bell works perfectly. Yet the person outside is too excited to use the bell. It can't be you. You're much too sneaking to knock and ask for admission.

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I open the door and my daughter is standing outside. I am always amazed by her beauty and her lack of knowledge of it or at least of her refusal to take advantage of it. How lovely to have a child like her.

"Mama," she says, "what on earth's the matter?" Not even a frown of worry can disturb her beauty. "I telephoned and there was no answer and suddenly I realized that it's been a week since you've called. I know how busy you are but you've never gone this long before without phoning me. Darling, come home with me now. It would be such a pleasure to have you. Please?"

I love my daughter and her husband and her children, but I can't infect their house with my fear. I can't spoil their happiness. I can't have you following me there. I beg off with a promise to come as soon as I can manage.

When she has kissed me and left I begin to work compulsively.

I polish silver. I tidy the broom closet. I arrange pots and pans in neat rows and realign the already regimented rows of canned food on the pantry shelves.

Mollie won't like this. She hates for me to tidy the kitchen or to polish the silver. Again and again she has said she ought to be out working for a woman who needs her more than I do. She says it makes her feel I no longer trust her to do the job I pay her to do.

But I must occupy myself. I must somehow black out my terror of you.

The shelves are in meticulous order and the silver glistens. The kitchen is spotless.

There's nothing else to do.

Yet I must occupy myself.

I can play solitaire.

There's something infinitely soothing in knowing that the cards may all be played one upon the other, black and red in descending order. At least there's a possibility that they may all find their prescribed places.

I don't often win. Still it's possible. And when I do win there's such a feeling of exuberance. Once I even won twice in succession. I wonder how often that has happened. I'm sure the probability of winning twice in succession in solitaire is most unlikely.

I take the cards from the second drawer of the red lacquered desk and then sit down at the fruitwood card table. I like the feel of the cards. As I riffle them they flutter like a bird beating its wings in my hands.

I play the first card.

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It's the ace of spades.

Death.

I won't believe it. I refuse to believe it.

Somehow my fear of you has infected the cards.

Yet I know the cards can't respond to my fear. There is no such thing as inanimate objects responding to human moods and emotions. My terror cannot have summoned up the card that signifies death.

Perhaps my fear did infect the cards.

If the mind can influence cards, then I will influence them. I pick the cards up from their various small stacks and shuffle them again. I must concentrate on a good luck card. The nine of hearts or the ten of diamonds—or, best of all, the ace of diamonds.

I shuffle and riffle the cards. Again, against my palms there is that feeling of the heartbeat of a bird or some small caged animal. I distribute the cards and prissily take time to make the seven stacks symmetrical.

I turn the first card face upward.

The ace of spades.

I push the ace of spades from me, then grasp it and try to tear it. It remains intact and blood oozes from the thin cut the card has made on my right forefinger.

I need reassurance—not reassurance from a wise professional or a dear friend but from a very particular source.

The walls of my large apartment seem to contract. I must escape before they crush me.

I go outside and hail a taxi, and as I enter it I repress my fear. I insist to myself that I'm on a lark, a small diversion, something foolish, but forgivable; any bored housewife could understand my action.

When I've ridden several miles I dismiss the taxi and tip the driver lavishly as if he's done me a special favor or service. I have not been let out at my real destination and must walk four blocks to my goal.

Outside there is a sign of a large hand marked like a road map, but its routes are the life line, the heart line, the line of destiny, and beneath it in small letters there is a legend: *Madame Sybil—the Past, Present, and Future.*

I have teased my friends who have come here and have smiled over their insistence that they don't believe a word of what Madame Sybil says; but going to her is fun, like getting a new hairdo or finding an unexpected bargain in an antique shop. But I had no such feeling of pleasure now. I was here from absolute necessity.

I pushed the bell.

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There was a long wait and the door was jerked open.

Madame looked like someone caught unaware. She had the petulance of someone aroused needlessly from sleep. Grease was smeared around her mouth beyond the splotched and spotted lipstick. Her tongue explored her teeth, as if for bits of food, and I realized I must have surprised her at a meal. She had the ruffled, somewhat annoyed air of someone summoned to an emergency; there was nothing about her of a sybil who could foretell the future or divine the past or give me sage counsel on how to act. But with a commanding motion that contradicted her disheveled appearance, she waved me down the hall to a doorway, then swept past me.

In a room cluttered with furniture she squinted against the sun eking through the slats of some dirty and disjointed Venetian blinds, and with theatrical flicks of her wrist she adjusted the blinds so that we were in darkness.

Then from somewhere behind me a thin light wavered and a candle projected unsteady shadows on the walls. There was another flickering of a match and almost immediately I began to smell incense of such stifling intensity that I coughed. Madame slid into a chair across from me at the heavily draped table and said, "Ten dollars." Her voice was as bland and impersonal as that of a checkout clerk at a supermarket counter demanding the amount to be paid for a cart of groceries.

I fumbled in my pocketbook. I shuffled through credit cards and dry-cleaning tickets and at last found some money. A lizard's tongue could not have been as quick as her hand darting for the money and there was a detour into her large bosom to bank the fee before her hands came to rest in her lap.

I waited for her to speak, to ask me why I was here, what I wanted to know. But there was only silence. After a while I was about to question her when she said angrily, "I can't tell you anything."

"I don't understand," I said. "You tell other people things. You've talked to a number of my friends and acquaintances. Last week you told Eloise Smithson she was going to get a legacy."

"I can't tell you anything," she said again, as if I hadn't heard her the first time. "Take your money and leave." Her right hand dived inside her bodice and then my bill sailed across the table and lighted like a crippled moth on the sleeve of

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my coat. "Take the money and go." Her voice was shrill.

I did not move. Then she screamed at me. She was like a very poor actress overplaying a scene. Her mouth curled in anger. "Leave this house at once," she ordered.

I left with as much dignity as I could muster. Even as she shrieked at me to leave I got up slowly and smoothed my skirt and tucked the money back into my bag and snapped the fastener and walked down the dim hall with composure, but once I was on the street I began to run.

I thrust people aside. I scrambled onto a bus, then got off. I took another bus in the direction from which I had just come. I was like a spy in a third-rate film who is trying to shake pursuers. I ran down an alley. I lost myself in the crowds of a department store.

I was trying to evade you.

Then I took a taxi home, to be swallowed up by the lobby of the apartment house where I live. Far beyond me, as unapproachable as an astronaut in orbit, was the receptionist behind the shield of a heavy glass partition. Nearer was the bank of elevators. I knew that none of my dodges or detours had worked and that you were in one of the elevators waiting for me.

I dared not risk taking an elevator. I left the elevators and skirted the gigantic plants in their huge cachepots that lined the passage to the stairway. I pulled at the door beneath the discreet sign marked STAIRS and scurried up the steps. I was tempted to stop at each landing to rest but fear of you made me race to my floor and terror forced me to brush so close against the wall of the corridor that paint scaled off onto my sleeve.

I had to stop for breath and I looked through one of a long row of tall windows hung with full thick draperies. I knew you were hiding somewhere in that endless line of heavily swathed windows. I looked down on the lawn with its neatly clipped boxwood hedges and rose-bushes bulging with blooms, and then I ran down the gantlet of windows expecting you to grab me.

At my door I pawed through my bag for the key. My trembling hand made it clatter outside the lock. I finally inserted the key and entered my apartment.

With the double-locked door at my back I whimpered with relief, but fear had drained me. I stood as still as an autistic child, as if any movement from me might arouse your wrath.

At last I fell across the bed

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in exhaustion and went to sleep, and then, after a while I awoke. My bed was a grave. I couldn't move. Wind blew through the windows. The curtains fluttered, swirled—one reached out and stroked my cheek. I had left the windows beside my bed open and the fire escape was just outside. It was an invitation to you to enter, an overt sign of welcome. I was like a virgin who invites rape. I was like a miser who entices thieves.

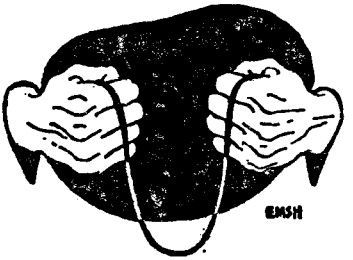
I glanced at the clock. Another night is over. There is some small comfort in the precise and orderly ticking of the clock, but only dread in the prospect of another day that will wither and become rancid by my fear of you.

Suppose I were to surrender. I'm weary of suspense. I'm tired of being wary.

But I won't surrender. Keep away from me. Mollie will be here soon. She'll protect me from you. I think that's her key in the lock now. Don't touch me. Keep away—

"I think she was afraid of you, Doctor."

"No, Mollie, she wasn't afraid of me. We've known each other since childhood. There was only one thing in the world for her to be afraid of—death."



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a *NEW* Schlock Homes story by

ROBERT L. FISH

Good news! The one and only Schlock Homes has returned, has come out of retirement, and no sooner has he renewed lodging with Dr. Watney at 221 B Bagel Street than a client appears and presents The Great Defective—pardon, The Great Detective—with a truly baffling (and, as usual, double-edged) problem . . . Homes rides again!

THE ADVENTURE OF THE BRIARY SCHOOL

by ROBERT L. FISH

I had thought these memoirs to be ended for all time, for although my notebooks contain many as-yet-untold adventures which I was fortunate enough to share with my good friend Mr. Schlock Homes, the fact is that since Homes's retirement to the Upson Downs for the purpose of bee-farming, he has forebade me to release any futher details of his many cases so long as he was no longer in the profession. It would bring him too much publicity, he feared, and would not permit him the seclusion he desired so fervently.

I was therefore quite surprised, one fine summer morning in the year '72, to hear a ring at the door and moments later to have my page usher in none other than Mr. Schlock Homes himself! I had retained our old rooms at 221 B Bagel Street, and at first I thought Homes had merely dropped in for a brief nostalgic visit while in town; but before I could even offer him a cold curry from the sideboard, he had called loudly down below and two large navvies came lumbering up the steps bearing his two trunks, his portmanteau, and a welter of boxes.

"Homes!" I cried in delight, coming to my feet, curry in hand. "You have come out of retirement!"

He put off answering until

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his gear had been placed down to his satisfaction, and then, paying off the men, he closed the door behind them and fell into a chair.

"Would you mind, Watney," he inquired, "sharing your solitude after all these years?"

"Homes!" I exclaimed. "You must know better than that! It is a pleasure. But what happened to the bee-farming?"

He shook his head, a slightly puzzled frown upon his lean features.

"This bee-farming," said he, pinching his lip, "is far more difficult than one might imagine. Year after year I planted the little devils at exactly the proper depth according to my calculations, inserted what I still feel was the correct amount of fertilizer, tamped each little hill down securely, and watered them daily. Yet not one single crop did I get!"

"Possibly you used old bees?" I asked helpfully.

"No," said he, shaking his head, "nor could it have been the soil. My carrots were more than satisfactory, and my neighbour—with whom I have a slight altercation regarding boundaries—was decent enough to say that my cucumbers, which he claims are growing on his property, will end up giving me a fine pickle. Or something on that order." He sighed heavily. "No, Watney; I fear I was meant to be a private investigator and nothing more. It is a pity there is no case awaiting me. I may have merely exchanged the frustration of bee-farming for the ennui of the city."

"I doubt that, Homes," I said with a smile. "Only this morning a telegram arrived addressed to you. I was about to send the page around to return it to sender, as I have the many others, when you arrived. Here it is now."

He accepted the form from me with eager fingers, tore open the envelope, and perused its contents with his old concentration. I sat back, pleased to be once more back in harness with Homes, and watched his nostrils dilate in that fashion I recognized from the old days as indicating his allergy to cold curry.

"Ah," said he at last, a faint smile upon his face, "nothing of great merit, but still a welcome start after my years of inaction. It appears that a certain Mr. Silas Cornbuckle—a name, you note, of uncertain national origin—has asked for an appointment at ten, and"—he glanced at the mantel clock just as the bell rang—"I shall be greatly surprised if this is not our Mr. Cornbuckle now!"

He leaned back comfortably

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as our page ushered in a stout young man of florid complexion, dressed in an atrociously striped garment, wearing a flaxen drooping moustache, and sporting a large chain across his weskit from which dangled a huge curved ornament.

Homes nodded politely, but even before he could properly greet his visitor, I interrupted, a bit smugly, perhaps.

"Come, Homes," said I, smiling. "Let us see if your years of bee-farming have or have not dulled your talents. At one time you used to brag of your ability to discern a person's nationality or occupation from his mere appearance. What say you of this gentleman?"

Homes's eyes twinkled as he readily accepted the challenge. Our guest stood frowning in puzzlement at our exchange as Homes considered the figure before him critically.

"You will note, Watney," he said at last, almost as if the years had not passed, or as if our guest were not in the room, "the clothing of our visitor is colored in red and white stripes. Since only a patriot would wear such a garment, we can only conclude our guest is from Canada. A further proof of his nationality, if further proof were needed, is the ornament on his watch-chain, which I recognize as being an elk's tooth, since elk are native to Canada.

"As for his occupation, we must consider the fact that the elk is known for its ferocity when facing dentistry of any sort, so anyone removing a tooth must be someone familiar with the ways of the beast. When we add to this the sagging shoulders, the typical stance of one trained to follow a spoor, we can state with confidence that our guest is a professional —and obviously intrepid— hunter!"

The large man stared at Homes in amazement.

"I cannot fathom how you do it, Mr. Homes!" he exclaimed, his jaw agape. "You are absolutely right in stating that I am a patriot, and I truly meant to wear my blue weskit, but I seem to have misplaced it. Actually, I am from the colony of New Jersey, although I have often visited Canada. I am also pleased that you recognize the courage of a member of the B.P.O.E. On the name, though, you were truly remarkable. Professional Hunter is my brother-in-law; I married his sister, Intrepid. As for the sagging shoulders, they come from carrying the luggage of ten young whippersnappers, and it is in connection with them that I find myself here."

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Homes nodded genially and waved a hand.

"Have the basket chair, pray," he said, "and tell me your story. I shall be happy to assist you in any manner within my power."

Our guest sank gratefully into the indicated chair and reached into his pocket, withdrawing a bit of paper. He contemplated it in frowning silence for a moment or two and then looked up, speaking earnestly.

"Mr. Homes, I am the professor of spelling at the exclusive Briary School in Woodbine, New Jersey. Each year the staff draws straws and the loser must accompany a group of students on the Grand Tour. This year I was the unfortunate one. I will not bore you with tales of my experiences to date, but will get directly to the point.

"This morning, Mr. Homes, I found the boys passing this note among them. Since in the past I have known to my sorrow that their boisterous spirits can become excessive at times, and since I could make neither head nor tail of the contents of the note I hastened to make inquiries as to the best advice possible, and am now here."

He reached out and presented the paper to Homes. My friend took it and studied it intently as I came to stand behind him, reading it over his shoulder. As Mr. Cornbuckle had so truthfully stated, it seemed to be pure gibberish. It was scrawled in a childish copperplate and read as follows:

"LSD party Savoy room 715. There will be lots of grass around as well, but NO heroin! We'll ship Papa Bear to the flicks."

There was no signature to this odd bit of nonsense. Mr. Silas Cornbuckle looked at Homes anxiously.

"I do pray, Mr. Homes," said he, "that you will be able to decipher this note and prove it merely to be the basis for some boyish prank and not, as I fear, something more serious."

Homes frowned at the small bit of paper in a manner which I knew indicated he had seen something in the weird phrases which had escaped both Mr. Cornbuckle and myself. When at last he raised his head his face was expressionless, but there was a fierce light hidden in his eye.

"I would hesitate to make judgment at first reading," said he, "but I fear you were quite right in seeking help in this matter. I seriously doubt if one might call this a boyish prank! May I ask a few questions?"

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"Of course!"

"These boys—they were not chosen for this trip on the basis of scholastic merit, I gather?"

"I do not know how you do it, Mr. Homes!" Silas Cornbuckle exclaimed, "but the fact is they are far from our best students. However, since their parents were the only ones who could afford the voyage, they were chosen."

"Still," Homes said, his voice deceptively soft, "even though they are not particularly studious, and even though they tend towards pranks, at times they do show gentlemanly traits, do they not?"

"It is true."

"And to finish my questioning, the next stop on your Grand Tour, I imagine, would be France?"

"Amazing!" Cornbuckle murmured, his eyes wide. "But, yes. It is. We leave with the morning tide."

Homes paid no attention to the adulation in the man's eyes, but nodded at him a bit abruptly.

"I suggest you remain in your quarters all day, for I hope to have an answer for you before the day is out. If you will leave your address with our page, I shall devote my entire efforts to a rapid solution of the problem!"

Once our visitor had left, Homes sprang to his feet, striding up and down the room in his old manner, his hands clasped behind his back, the note waving there from his long fingers. At last he fell into a chair, staring at the words fiercely, wriggling about in his chair in a manner I knew meant Mrs. Essex had put too much starch in his underwear.

"Homes," I asked. "Can it be a code?"

"No, no!" said he, shaking his head impatiently. "It is far more intricate than that! It is quite obvious that the plan to kidnap the Chancellor is well advanced. The only problem is how to foil the dastardly plot!"

"Homes!" I exclaimed reproachfully. "Surely after all these years of absence you have not returned merely to pull my leg!"

He considered me for several moments coldly, and then answered my question with one of his own, an irritating habit he knew infuriated me.

"Have you nothing to do, Watney? Visit Albert Hall, or the British Museum? Enjoy the pleasant scenery of Putney? Or even see a patient?"

The years had not lessened my ability to read meaning into the slightest nuance in my friend's tone. I came instantly to my feet.

"As a matter of fact," I said

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coolly, "I have a cepillectomy scheduled, and should have been there before now."

But Homes had already forgotten my presence, and as I left the room he was reaching for a Vulgarian and a vespa, the paper still clutched fiercely in his fingers.

When I returned some two hours later, brushing hair from my lapel, it was to find the room full of smoke and Homes smiling quite genially at me from his chair. I recognized that he had discovered the solution to the problem.

"You must forgive me, Watney," he said, waving languidly towards the sideboard and the libation he had prepared there. "But by now you should be familiar with my humours, and time was of the essence. After all, the ides of July are almost upon us and it would not do to allow this crime to be perpetrated without raising a finger!"

I poured myself a drink and turned to face him.

"Come, Homes," I said. "You cannot possibly mean you read some intelligent meaning into those few confused scrawls! After all, I saw the note as well as you, and I swear there was nothing there that lent itself to understanding!"

Homes shook his head in disappointment.

"Really, Watney! There was everything there. The meaning was quite clear. These young lads fully intend to kidnap one of Britain's leading statesmen and hold him, obviously for ransom, in the countryside of France, confident in their ignorance that they can fool the French police. The fact that they planned this wicked deed without involving young ladies is, of course, to their credit, but it still does not mitigate the seriousness of their intent."

I stared at Homes. He read the meaning in my frown and smiled.

"No, Watney," said he with a chuckle. "I am not mad, nor am I pulling your leg." His face straightened into seriousness as he reached over, taking up the note. "I have sent our page for Mr. Silas Cornbuckle, and until he arrives there should be ample time to explain this business to you."

He leaned over, placing the note on a table where we both might peruse it at the same time.

"It was really quite simple, Watney," he began. "Let us consider this note. It reads: *'LSD party Savoy room 715. There will be lots of grass around as well, but NO heroin! We'll ship Papa Bear to the*

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flicks.' As I had previously deduced from reading this, the boy writing these words was obviously a poor student. While I was too polite to mention the fact to Mr. Cornbuckle, since he is their professor, the spelling is atrocious."

His thin finger came out, pointing.

"For example, take the word 'Savvy,' a common Colonial slang expression. And the word 'room' used as the abbreviation of the word Roman. Or 'flicks,' which is never spelled with a 'k.' Not to mention omitting the final 'e' from the word 'heroine'." He shook his head. "Shocking!"

"But, Homes," I exclaimed a bit plaintively. "I still do not understand!"

Homes shook his head sadly at my ignorance.

"Really, Watney!" he said, and sighed. "Ah, well, let us start at the beginning, then. 'LSD' is obviously, 'Pounds, Shillings, Pence'. Therefore the 'LSD party' can be nobody but the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The 'room 715'—or, more properly spelled, 'Rom. 715'—refers to the Roman calendar for the seventh month, the fifteenth day, or—as you may know—to-morrow's date. This afternoon I verified, as I had suspected, that the Chancellor travels to-night by the channel steamer for a conference in Paris."

"But what made you suspect France in the first place?" I asked, amazed as always at the constant proof of Homes's brilliance.

"Note the last line, Watney." Homes pointed to the paper. " 'We'll ship Papa Bear to the flicks.' In the colonies they have a mascot known as Smokey; it can only be he to whom 'Papa Bear' can refer. When we consider that the French police are known as 'flics,' the entire message becomes clear."

He leaned back, considering me gravely. "On the basis of our analysis, let us now re-read the note. It says: 'The Chancellor of the Exchequer, understand? To-morrow, July 15th. (We'll hide him) in the countryside—the reference to grass, of course. No girls will be allowed to participate. We'll put down a smoke-screen for the French police."

I brought my dazed eyes up from the slip of paper.

"Marvellous, Homes," I breathed worshipfully. Then I saw a problem. "But, Homes!" I cried. "At this late hour, how can this foul scheme be scotched?"

"Easily—" he began, and then paused as the sound of footsteps on our stairs could be

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heard. A moment later Mr. Silas Cornbuckle burst into our quarters.

"Mr. Homes!" he cried. "I pray you have the answer! What did the message intend to convey?"

"I cannot reveal that," Homes replied quietly. "It could do nothing but damage the already tenuous ties between the American colony and the mother country. However, I can tell you how to avoid any unpleasant consequences from your charges' intended deed."

"Of course, Mr. Homes," said Silas Cornbuckle. "What can I do?"

"You must cancel France from your tour," Homes said. "There is no other solution."

Mr. Silas Cornbuckle stared at my friend. "But the boys—"

"—will doubtless be disappointed," Homes said, concluding the other's sentence. "I am sure," he added dryly, and shrugged. "Well, one cannot have everything. However, if you wish a suggestion, you might consider giving the lads a special treat, as compensation."

Mr. Cornbuckle grasped the recommendation eagerly. "Such as?"

"Well," Homes said, considering the matter, "I imagine an evening at one of our local hostelries might help them get over their disappointment. In fact," he added, "it might even be better if you left them to their own devices, thus indicating your faith in their ability to entertain themselves properly." He smiled at our guest genially. "To while away the hours while the lads are occupied, you might go to the cinema. I have never seen the Nickelodeon, but I understand it interests many."

"It shall be as you say," Mr. Cornbuckle said, and turned to the door. He paused and bowed. "Nor can I thank you enough, Mr. Homes."

"A pleasure," Homes said, and returned the bow, as we watched Homes's first client stumble through the doorway, overcome with gratitude.

The following morning I came into the dining-room to find Homes already before me, replacing the remnants of curry with stuffed chutneys, his own favourite. As he served himself and took his place at the table, I seated myself and opened the morning journal. Homes drew his napkin into his lap, speared his first chutney, and looked at me questioningly.

"Do you find anything in the paper to interest an up-coming, ambitious, and newly-investitured private investigator this morning?" he inquired in a tone that was only half-joking.

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"I am not sure, Homes," I said slowly, reading further into the article which had caught my attention. "There is this, if you might be interested. It seems there was a narcotics raid at a local hotel last night, but it appears the miscreants all managed to escape. The police are seeking whatever help they can obtain."

Homes sat erect.

"As you know, Watney," said he, "at one time I, myself, was the victim of the foul habit. There is no traffic I consider more reprehensible! A telegram to the authorities, offering my services, if you would!" He leaned back. "Although," he added thoughtfully, "once the criminals hear that Schlock Homes is on the case, I should be gravely dubious if they do not flee the country by the first packet."

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As you know, we rarely publish nonfiction. When we do, it is usually something "special." Here is a most imaginative article—delightful reading!

A HUDDLE OF ARMCHAIRS

by EDWARD WELLEN

James Lipton, in his delightful book on collective nouns, *An Exaltation of Larks or, The Venereal Game* (1968), cites Chapter XI of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's historical novel, *Sir Nigel*, wherein young Nigel learns "that for every collection of beasts in the forest, and for every gathering of birds of the air, there is their own private name so that none may be confused with another." Nigel already knows "a skulk of foxes," "a cete of badgers," "a singular of boars," "a nye of pheasants," "a gaggle of geese," "a badling (paddling?) of ducks," "a fall of woodcock," and "a wisp of snipe." But, lions not being prevalent in Woolmer Forest, Nigel has to be told that the correct term for a number of them is "a pride of lions."

Mr. Lipton is at pains to explain that the "venereal" in his title refers to the medieval Books of Venery, which taught highborn young huntsmen the right terms for groups of their quarry.

May we not extend the language of the chase to embrace criminous collective nouns, as long foreshadowed in the Biblical "a cloud of witnesses"? Here's a stab at it.

1. WHOS

A slew of sleuths
An archness of flatfoots
A wink of private eyes
A piggybank of coppers
A hush of spies
A cancel of blackmailers
A covey of smugglers
A jolly roger of poisoners
A seam of pickpockets
A withdrawal of embezzlers

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A flush of voyeurs
A hunger of conspirators
A file of convicts
A swarmth of firebugs
A finger of crooks
A smithy of forgers
A hatch of homicidal lunatics
A cull of culprits
A bumble of accomplices
A glower of suspects
A silence of butlers
A halo of innocents
An ignorance of least-likelies

2. WHATS

A mort of murders
A corps of corpses
A sieve of disappearing corpses
A clash of wills
A match of arsons
A snatch of kidnapings
A heap of graves

3. WHENS

A smug of alibis
A dickering of clocks
An exception of timetables
A shift of datelines

4. WHERES

A bolt of locked rooms
An orientation of expresses
A gathering of gothics
A dusting of parlors

5. HOWS

A marple of clues
A wiggle of disguises
A chivvy of chases
A tattoo of fingerprints
A patter-n of footprints
A phrenzy of sluggings

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A barrel of guns
A skill of red herrings
A group of bloodstains
A fairness of evidence

6. WHYS
A moot of motives
A rash of confessions
A dannay of denouements
A drood of inconclusions

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NGAIO MARSH *(about Inspector Roderick Alleyn)*
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PATRICIA HIGHSMITH *(different even for her)*
ANTHONY GILBERT *(different for her too)*
EDWARD D. HOCH *(about Captain Leopold)*

and Part One of an unusual article by

JOHN DICKSON CARR *(about English highwaymen,*

and an Honor Roll reprint by

AGATHA CHRISTIE *(about Hercule Poirot)*

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a *NEW* "library cop" story by

JAMES HOLDING

The second adventure of Hal Johnson, library cop, bibliophilic bloodhound, second-hand book sleuth, and altogether an unusual and interesting type of 'tec. . .Herbert Campbell looked mild, meek, and gentle, just a "harmless, eccentric old booklover". . .

MORE THAN A MERE STORYBOOK

by JAMES HOLDING

I wasn't ready for his violent reaction. He hurled the heavy glass ashtray at me from pointblank range with the accuracy of a big-league pitcher splitting the strike zone.

The tray caught me a stunning blow on the temple and, as they say, I saw stars. Believe me I did. Plenty of them.

While I sagged on the sofa, dazed and groggy, Campbell scurried into an inner room, came out with an oversize brief case, and ran for the door like a beagle after a rabbit.

He should have finished me off. By the time he was halfway down the steps to the apartment house lobby I had gathered my few senses together and was able to stand up and then follow him. My whole life recently seemed to consist of following Herbert Campbell.

I went down the stairway after him two steps at a time. I caught him before he reached the doorway that led outside. When I put a choke hold on him from behind, none too gently in spite of his being an old man, the fight went completely out of him. He dropped his brief case as though its handle were red-hot and began to tear at my forearm across his throat.

I eased up a little as his face congested. "Pick up your brief case," I said and released him. "Let's go back upstairs."

He nodded meekly. He picked up the brief case and we climbed up the stairway to his apartment. I held his right arm in a businesslike grip.

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Once back in his living room he collapsed into an easy chair and began to sob weakly. Keeping a weather eye on him, I lifted his brief case to the table top and opened it up.

It was full of clothing. Shirts, socks, underwear, slacks. Campbell had been about to leave town when I arrived, it seemed. I rummaged around in the case and at the very bottom, under the layers of clothing, I found two books.

I pulled them out and looked at them. Volume I and Volume II. Their half-calf covers were soiled and stained and worn; a corner of Volume II was bent; there was a slight tear along the spine of Volume I.

Not library books, certainly. One look at the title page of Volume I showed me what they were. I turned another page in Volume I, reverently now, and stared at what was written on the flyleaf in faded brownish-colored ink.

That was when I called Lieutenant Randall of the metropolitan police. I suddenly had the uneasy feeling that Herbert Campbell was too big game for a mere library cop to handle.

The fourth name on my list for the day was Herbert Campbell at an address on Dennison Avenue. I parked my car a block away and walked to the sleazy apartment house where Campbell lived. The building was a rundown relic of better days.

I went into the vestibule, found out from the mailboxes that Campbell's apartment was number 22, on the second floor, and walked up. I played a tattoo on the door panel of number 22, and after a while the door opened to show me a cherubic, ruddy-faced gent with no chin and a white bristly mustache. He was about 60, I figured, give or take a couple of years, and his head was bald except for an inch of fringe around the edges that matched his white mustache.

Over the raised voices of two women quarreling in a TV soap opera I asked, "Mr. Campbell?"

"Yes," he said, giving me a sharp look out of mild blue eyes. "And who are you?"

"I'm from the public library," I said politely. "I've come about all those overdue library books you have, Mr. Campbell."

"Oh," he said, and his look of inquiry changed to one of guilt. "Oh, yes. Come in, won't you? I'm very embarrassed about those books. I know I should have returned them long ago. I got the notices, of course." He stepped back. I

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went into his apartment.

It turned out to be surprisingly clean and attractive. There were a sofa and a round coffee table; two easy chairs, one with a tall bridge lamp beside it and a plastic cushion that showed existence of much sitting, and a floor-to-ceiling wall of bookshelves, well filled, opposite the sofa. The TV was in a corner, going full blast.

He switched off the TV, motioned to a chair, and said, "Won't you sit down?"

I said, still politely, "No, thanks. If you'll just give me your overdue library books and the fine you owe, I'll be on my way."

"Certainly, certainly. I have the books right here." He gestured at a pile of books on the coffee table. "I was all ready to bring them back, you see."

"Why didn't you?" I asked. I began to check the book titles against my list. They were all there.

"I've been sick." He gave me another treatment of his mild blue eyes.

"Sorry to hear that, Mr. Campbell. You could have renewed the books, you know."

Campbell was sheepish. "Well, I must confess, Mr.—ah—"

"Johnson," I said.

"Yes, I must confess, Mr. Johnson, that there's another reason I'm overdue." He cleared his throat. "You see, I quite literally *hate* to return library books. Can you understand that? I have this fierce love for books, any books, and when I have them in my possession it takes all my will power to make myself let them go. I'd never borrow books at all if I could afford to own enough of my own. Like these." He waved a thin hand toward his bookshelves. "I guess I'm what they call a bibliophile. Are you familiar with the term?"

"Sure," I said. "I work for the library, remember?"

"Yes. Well then, you can appreciate the mixed feelings I have every time I am compelled to return books to the library! I know they don't belong to me, but I am terribly reluctant to give them up. You know? Especially, of course, if I haven't finished reading them."

"I know," I said. I'd run into plenty of book nuts. I began to gather his overdue books into a manageable stack. "You owe us a pretty big fine on this batch, Mr. Campbell."

"This is the first time I've ever actually *ignored* the overdue notices," he explained apologetically. "I did *so* want to finish this one, this novel, before I brought them back." He tapped the book at the top

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of the stack, a current best-seller called *Sexless in Salinas.* "It's so fascinating, so well done, that I can't bear to finish it and end my pleasure. You ever feel that way about a book, Mr. Johnson? Yet I can't bear *not* to finish it, either." He laughed.

I laughed, too. I'd read that particular book myself. "Listen, Mr. Campbell, I'll make a deal with you. Pay your fines on all these other books and I'll leave that one with you so you can finish it. Fair enough?"

"Oh, would you? How very kind!" He took *Sexless in Salinas* from the stack, hugged it to his chest, and asked how much he owed me.

I told him. He dipped his hand into his pants pocket and brought out money. While he counted out the fine I idly ran an eye over his bookshelves across the room. Judging from the few titles I could read from that far away, he had the catholic tastes of a true bibliophile. I saw a book on the flora of Nevada, one on weightlifting, and a home-repair guide, cheek by jowl with numerous fiction titles.

Mr. Campbell said, "There you are, Mr. Johnson. And thanks for being so understanding about my—ah—affliction." He smiled at me as though at a fellow bibliophile. "I'll return this one to the library as soon as I finish reading it."

I nodded and left.

I went back to my car, unlocked it, and added Mr. Campbell's overdue library books to the others I'd already collected. There were a lot of them. Then I crawled under the wheel, started the engine, and headed for the main library downtown. My morning's work was officially over now, except for turning in the overdue books and the fines.

After that I hadn't much to do until lunch except to sit at my desk in the little room behind the business manager's office and indulge my curiosity about that old booklover, Herbert Campbell, who had wanted to finish *Sexless in Salinas* even at the cost of paying another few days' fine.

Well, a phone comes with my office, so I figured it wouldn't cost anything to feed my curiosity. I picked up the telephone and got on to Ellen Corby, one of our librarians who is currently trying to make up her mind whether she'll marry me or not. I asked her if she'd give me the inventory record on *Sexless in Salinas.* She said she would.

She called me back a few minutes later. "Twenty-seven copies, Hal," she said. "It's a popular item."

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"Yeah, no wonder," I said. "Have you read it?"

"Of course. Can't you see my maidenly blush?"

"How are the twenty-seven split, Ellen?"

"Six and three," Ellen said.

"Thanks." I hung up. You're not supposed to engage in social chitchat on the library's time.

Twenty-seven copies, split six and three. Six at the main library, three at each of our seven branches.

My next call was to the checkout desk. "Inventory says you have six copies of *Sexless in Salinas* circulating," I said, after identifying myself. "Can you account for all six?"

"Why?" asked the girl, irritated. "Are you queer for best-sellers, or something?"

"Just answer the question, honey."

"I'll call you back."

When she did she said, "Four are out, one is in the return pile."

"How about the other one?"

"Gone," she said. "No record."

"Not on the shelf?"

"No. I looked. You want its catalogue number?"

"Never mind. Is one of your 'out' copies on library card XL-392716?" That was Herbert Campbell's library card number on my overdue list.

"Yes," she said after a minute. "And incidentally, it's long overdue."

"Thanks," I said.

In turn I telephoned all seven of our branches and checked on their copies of *Sexless in Salinas*. Out of the 21 copies supposed to be circulating through the branch libraries four had vanished without trace.

I sat back in my chair and thought about that for a while. Then I had another idea. I walked down the corridor to the room where our card-catalogue cabinets are. There I went through the cards under the letter 'F' and pretty soon I was looking at a card with the neatly typed book title I was hunting: *The Flora of Nevada*. I took down its number and shelf position and searched the shelves for the book without success. Then I asked Ellen to see if she could locate it for me. She couldn't—neither the book itself nor any record of its having been borrowed. Inventory showed the library had bought only one copy of that book, for the main library. None for the branches.

I thought about that, too.

What all this thinking led to, of course, was the conclusion that my friendly bibliophile, Herbert Campbell, was stealing the library blind; and that since I'm a library cop, hired to chase down stolen and overdue books

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by the public library, I'd better do something about it.

So, after a leisurely lunch at Morris's Cafeteria, I set out again for Dennison Avenue. It was a lovely spring afternoon. Whipped-cream clouds drifted lazily across a delft-blue sky. I caught the delicate fragrance of lilacs through my open car window as I drove. And I wished Ellen Corby would make up her mind to marry me and save me from a lifetime of dreary cafeterias like Morris's.

I parked about a hundred yards south of Campbell's apartment house—the only parking space I could find on the block—got out of my car and started toward the entrance, thinking about what I'd say to him and how tough an act I should put on. Although I'm allowed to carry a gun and make arrests, I didn't figure to need a gun to handle old Campbell, and I hadn't decided yet whether to arrest him or not. That depended on how many of the library's books I could recover and whether he'd be willing to pay the big overdue fines I'd assess on them.

While I was still about fifty yards away, Herbert Campbell came out of the apartment-house entrance carrying a king-size brief case which seemed pretty heavy, to judge from the way he handled it when he unlocked a gray VW at the curb and maneuvered the brief case into the back seat. Then Campbell got into the car himself.

I had to make a quick decision—should I brace him now or let it go until later? His brief case made up my mind. It seemed possible, from its evident weight, that the case contained books. If it did, and the books happened to belong to the public library, I wanted to see where they were going.

So I turned and went back to my car, slid into the driver's seat, and waited until the VW pulled out from the curb. Then I took out after Campbell's car, hanging far enough back so that he wouldn't notice I was trailing him. I hoped.

We played follow-the-leader through light traffic to the South Side. When Campbell pulled up in front of a row of stores on Cameron Way I drove right on by, rounded the next corner, and parked. I ran back to the corner in time to see Campbell and his brief case disappearing into the middle shop of the seven in the row.

I debated with myself for half a minute on what to do next, finally lit a cigarette and sat down on a corner bench meant for the convenience of bus riders. From there I could

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see the entrance to the shop and Campbell's parked car.

In about ten minutes he reappeared on the sidewalk, still carrying his brief case. Now, though, from the effortless way he swung it into the back of his car, I figured the case was empty. He started up, drove toward me, and went rolling past without even a glance in my direction. Then he took a left at the next block and went out of sight. I let him go.

I walked down the sidewalk to the store Campbell had entered. A sign over the door said: The Red Quill, Edwin Worthington, Prop. The merchandise displayed in the store window was books and more books. My friendly bibliophile, Herbert Campbell, had been paying a visit to the second-hand bookshop.

I opened the door and went inside. The interior seemed very dim after the bright sunshine outside, but I could make out tables and racks and shelves of books on every side.

The man standing at the counter at the back of the shop talking on the telephone must be Edwin Worthington, Prop., because he nodded at me when he saw me come in and mouthed silently at me above his telephone receiver, "Be right with you," then went back to his conversation.

I browsed idly through his stock of books, paying no attention to him until he said into the phone, "Octavo, yes, yes, 1719, eh? Good. That's what I thought it was but I wanted to be sure. Thanks very much, Miss Gilchrist. Thanks *very* much!"

He hung up and turned on me one of the most radiant smiles I'd seen recently. His full beard tended to hide his mouth, but there was no mistaking the full set of white teeth or the triumphant lilt of his voice when he said, "Now, then, what can I do for you, sir?" He was feeling very good about something.

"Just browsing, thanks," I answered him.

He waved a hand. "Help yourself."

I stepped over to the fiction shelves and pulled out a copy of *Sexless in Salinas* and thumbed through it. Then, carrying it with me, I drifted over to Worthington who was leaning against his counter beside the cash register.

I held up *Sexless in Salinas* "Isn't this a best-seller?" I asked.

He nodded. "Second on the list for several months now."

"Is it available in paperback yet?"

"Not yet."

"How come you have

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best-sellers while they're still so popular?"

He shrugged. "From book club members, estates being settled, people moving away. And of course, from church bazaars, rummage sales, charity book sales of all kinds. Lately I've had a part-time man covering the charity things for me. That book you have there was one of a batch he brought in just a few minutes ago."

I put the book down on the counter beside his cash register. "I'll take it," I said. "How much?"

"Dollar and a quarter. It's a six ninety-five book." Then he smiled that big smile again. He was still feeling very expansive. "I'll let you have it for a dollar today, though."

"How come?"

"Call it a going-out-of-business price. I'm celebrating. I've had a lucky break and I'm going to close up my shop."

"Great," I said. I gave him a dollar. "Happy retirement, Mr. Worthington."

Back in my car I examined the second-hand copy of *Sexless in Salinas* with the help of a good magnifying glass I carried on the end of my key chain. I found what I expected. A slight granulation of the inside front cover's end paper where a solvent had been used to remove the card pocket pasted in the front of all library books. The front flyleaf, where the library's name stamp appears, had been cut out. There were barely discernible traces of the library's name stamp lingering on the closed-page edges after treatment with an ink eradicator. And very faint evidence on some of the page margins that the book's identification number had been removed.

What I'd got for my dollar at The Red Quill was one of the library's missing copies of *Sexless in Salinas*, skillfully doctored by a certain bibliophile named Herbert Campbell.

So now I not only knew that a thief was robbing the library, but I knew the receiver of his stolen goods. An innocent receiver, I was sure, but a receiver, all the same. So I'd know where to find a lot of our library books after I'd taken care of Campbell.

With that information in my possession, my sense of urgency about Campbell subsided. There was no hurry about arresting him now. I decided to finish my overdue calls that afternoon, take Ellen to dinner and the movies, as planned, and get to Campbell first thing in the morning. I felt a little sorry for the old boy, as a matter of fact, even though I knew he was an unmitigated thief.

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I was back at the library at quitting time. I walked through the reference department to pick up Ellen for our date and found Annie Gilchrist putting on her jacket to go home. "Annie," I said, pausing at her desk, "you got a telephone call from a Mr. Worthington of The Red Quill bookshop this afternoon about two o'clock, didn't you?"

"Nope," said Annie, "I called him. To answer a question he'd phoned in earlier."

"Whatever you told him on the phone made him so happy," I said, "that he gave me a discount on a book I was buying from him at the time."

"You were *buying* a book?" Annie exclaimed. "With the whole public library system here to supply you with free reading material?"

"I hate to accept charity," I said, grinning. "What was the question you had to look up for Worthington?"

"The date of the first edition of *Robinson Crusoe.*"

"1719?"

"That was it. You must have been eavesdropping."

"I was. Did Worthington *have* a first edition?"

"He didn't say. Just wanted to be sure of the date."

"Would a first edition of *Robinson Crusoe* be worth a lot?"

"Depends on what you mean by a lot. And what condition the first edition is in."

"Enough for Worthington to retire on?"

She shook her head. "I doubt it very much, Hal."

"How much do you think it would be worth?"

"I'll look it up for you tomorrow," Annie said. "Right now, if you don't mind, I'm going home." She grabbed her purse and started out.

"Forget it, Annie," I called after her. "I was just curious."

I was knocking at Herbert Campbell's door at nine the next morning. He opened at my second knock and recognized me at once. He was in his shirt sleeves, his fringe of white hair tousled, his eyes as innocent of guile as a child's. Holding the door open a few inches he said, "Why, hello, Mr. Johnson."

I said, "May I come in for a minute?"

"I haven't finished that last book yet."

"I want to read you something," I said.

He backed up, puzzled, and I followed him in. "I don't understand," he said mildly, "but whatever it is, read it to me, by all means." He went to sit in his favorite chair, the one with the dent in the seat cushion.

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I read him my Miranda card, informing him of his legal rights. When I finished he stared at me. "What in heaven's name does *that* mean?"

I sat down at one end of the sofa. "It means I'm going to arrest you."

"Arrest me?" His gaze was incredulous. "What am I supposed to have done?"

"I'll tell you what you've done. You've been stealing books from the public library for months. You've been using your library card to borrow books legitimately at all our branches and every time you borrowed you walked out with three or four *extra* books under your coat or in your brief case that you didn't bother to have the librarian check out. You've been bringing these stolen books here to your apartment, removing the library's identification marks, and peddling the books for whatever you can get."

Campbell shook his head in bewilderment.

I plowed on. "You keep the stolen books here"— I pointed to his crowded bookshelves— "until you think the heat, if any, has died down, using your apartment as a sort of warehouse for stolen books. And you also use it, I might add, to build up your image of a harmless eccentric who loves books so much he just can't bear to part with them. That's why you held those overdue library books until I came to collect them yesterday—so you could impress me with your eccentricity and establish a bibliophile image with the library authorities."

"Why," asked Mr. Campbell reasonably, his eyes still mild and puzzled, "would I try to establish an image like that?" He was toying with a thick glass ashtray on the arm of his easy chair.

"Because you know that in the normal case of book theft from the public library by a bona-fide bibliophile type, all we usually do is hit him with a fine and take back our books. You figured if we ever tumbled to your operation you would qualify for the same treatment—a fine instead of prison."

"The only thing wrong with your theory, Mr. Johnson," said Campbell with dignity, "is that it happens to be quite untrue. Who, for example, would I sell stolen library books to, for heaven's sake?"

"The Red Quill bookshop, for one," I answered. "I talked to Mr. Worthington yesterday."

And that's when he threw the ashtray at me.

As it turned out I was right to call Lieutenant Randall into

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the case. He sat across from me in Clancy's Bar and Grill that evening, off duty, and told me about it.

"When we got there," he said, "The Red Quill had a penciled sign on the door saying the shop was closed. But there was a light on in the living quarters upstairs—a lamp we could see through the front second-floor window. So we tried to raise Worthington. When we couldn't, we went in and found him at the foot of the flight of steps that leads down from his rooms upstairs. Dead as a mackerel. With a broken neck."

I murmured, "Did he fall or was he pushed?" I was feeling rotten. If I had gone after Campbell yesterday instead of waiting, I might possibly have saved Worthington's life.

"He was pushed," Randall said.

"How do you know?"

"There was a lump the size of an egg on his head and we found a wrought-iron ashtray upstairs with blood and hair to match."

I sighed. "He likes ashtrays." My temple was still sore.

"Yeah." Randall's gaze was amused. "Campbell admits the killing now. Says Worthington told him about the first edition when he delivered those stolen books to The Red Quill yesterday. The first edition was a lucky break—found among hundreds of old books Worthington bought from an estate. The owners never knew what they had, of course."

"More than a mere storybook," I murmured.

"What's that?"

"*Robinson Crusoe.* That's how Edward Everett Hale described it."

"Well," Randall went on, refusing to be sidetracked by this literary allusion, "Worthington told Campbell if the *Robinson Crusoe* first edition turned out to be genuine, he was going to close his bookstore and retire. So Campbell went back to The Red Quill about one o'clock last night, killed Worthington, and swiped the book." Randall grinned. "Just a harmless, eccentric old booklover."

I grunted. "He's not a real booklover," I said. "He wanted to be rich, that's all. Did you notice that signature on the flyleaf of Volume One?"

"Yeah. Some guy's name," Randall said. "I can't remember it."

"Button Gwinnett."

"Sounds like the head of the sewing circle. Who was Button Gwinnett, for God's sake?"

"Only one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence."

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Randall refused to be impressed. "Well, well," he said. "So he owned a copy of *Robinson Crusoe*. So what?"

"A first edition of *Robinson Crusoe*," I said quietly, "with Button Gwinnett's signature in it would sell at auction for a quarter of a million dollars, Lieutenant, maybe more."

"What!"

It was my turn to grin. "Button Gwinnett signed the Declaration of Independence, all right, but apparently that's about all he *did* sign during his lifetime. Except for Worthington's first edition of *Robinson Crusoe*. Button Gwinnett's signature is one of the rarest—and therefore one of the most valuable—in the whole autograph-collecting field. So you see what a beautiful combination Campbell killed Worthington to get? A first edition of *Robinson Crusoe* autographed by Button Gwinnett. It's fabulous."

Randall was impressed at last. "What becomes of the book now?"

"Worthington's heirs get it, I suppose—if he bought it fair and square from that estate."

"Some legacy," Randall breathed, "from a second-hand bookdealer!" He put his opaque stare on me. "What tipped you off to this Campbell in the first place?" he asked.

I told him about the song and dance Campbell had given me yesterday about wanting to finish reading *Sexless in Salinas* before I took the book away from him.

"I don't see anything in that," Randall said.

"You're not a second-hand book expert, that's why," I explained. "But *I* am. So I noticed that when Campbell was begging to keep the book so he could finish reading it, he had two *other* copies of *Sexless in Salinas* right there on his bookshelves in plain view."

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This is the 380th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . a poignant and poetic debut in print . . .

The author, R. L. White, was 64 when she submitted "In the Cool Clearing" — what an encouragement to all new writers, young and old! She has worked most of her life as a secretary, writing prose and poetry in her spare time; now, retired, she is devoting herself almost exclusively to studying and writing. Her hobbies are handgun target shooting, horseback riding, reading, listening to music, listening to others talk, and trying to know and understand people (the last a sure route, at any age, to perceptive writing) . . .

IN THE COOL CLEARING

by R. L. WHITE

It wasn't my fault. No one believes me. It was my old woman's fault. I didn't even mean to. The man from the D.A.'s office told the jury I was worse than an animal and the lawyer supposed to defend me looked sick when he talked to me. It wasn't my fault. But no one believes me.

It always made me especially lonesome to look at the old Hazlitt place and I didn't go there ever except when I had to water the bushes and trim the trees. When the Hazlitts lived there it was interesting to watch them and their friends and the guesthouse almost always had someone in it. A young couple or a pair of girls or a pair of young men were the kind in the guesthouse and at that time I was kept busy helping with the horses and going down to the market in the pickup. When all the Hazlitts finally left, the whole property was up for sale and no one would rent the big house or the little one. The guesthouse would have been more trouble than it was worth even rented because it really didn't amount to much.

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Of couse I had the chickens to take care of and the roadside stand but even so all that wasn't enough to take up my mind. I tried to stay out of my house as much as I could because my old woman talked all the time and I couldn't stand it. I kept a supply of wine in the shed behind the chicken feed and I used it just enough to fortify myself—I was never drunk of course so she didn't know.

I'd tell my old woman to keep quiet and I thought that was reasonable because she did have the TV and there was a neighbor no more than half a mile down the road. But she wouldn't. As soon as I got to the porch she'd start in about one thing or another that she saw on the TV or about something she wanted me to do.

One thing I had all to myself besides the wine was the hill. When I got too lonesome I could go to the back of my place where the land rises and look across at the hill. Part of it made me think of a woman sleeping without any clothes on so you could see her stomach and bare legs. The light was always changing on the hill. There would be the soft gray of daylight before the sun was up and the different colors during the day.

Perhaps the best time was just after the sun was down when the purple flowed down the hillside like a coat of paint or a soft drapery that clung to the folds like a dress clings and the sky was a distant pale green with clouds pulled thin in bits and scraps. In the moonlight the hill was a secret of moving shadows. . .

I was watering the Hazlitt bushes when a truck pulled in and went on around to the guesthouse. A few boxes and a trunk were unloaded onto the porch and a few minutes later a small car drew up. I saw a young-looking woman get out and go in and then in a few minutes I saw her pay the truckman and move her car. She watched the truck out of sight down the highway and then she turned and lifted her arms to the sky for a minute. For quite a while after that she just sat on the porch.

My old woman had seen the truck and car and she wanted to know if the Hazlitt place had been sold. I only told her what I'd seen and she was all for going right up to the house to get acquainted. However, she went ahead with our supper and I was relieved when she said she would wait to give the neighbor time to get settled. I had something else private to think about.

The next morning I watched

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the guesthouse from the pump shed and the new neighbor was out early. She was dressed in a robe and held a cup in both hands. She sipped slowly and watched the sun spread over the country. Presently she set the cup aside and tossed the robe back from her shoulders. She was wearing nothing except two little bits of a sunsuit and she couldn't have known there was anyone for miles.

I wondered how she would be—if she would be friendly or standoffish. If she was friendly maybe I could tell her about the hill. Thinking about her reminded me of a time in a Phoenix store when a girl clerk squirted all the perfumes into a cloud that I smelled for days. I didn't notice the chickens or my old woman or even the trees.

Whenever I thought I would see the neighbor I went to the pump shed and when she didn't appear I would go to look at the hill. Then it was all right. The perfumed cloud of thinking about her and looking at the hill belonged together.

I was in the grove when I saw her go down to the highway and turn toward my own house so I stayed away as long as I could. When I came in to eat supper my old woman was all excited.

"What do you mean," she demanded, "not knowing what kind of woman she is? Mrs. Rollins came to buy eggs and she was nice and refined."

She slammed the plates on the table and began to dish up our supper.

"I wish all the neighbors were like her," she said. "Now you must manage to take the pickup to town for her little piano. Living alone she will *need* the piano and I am going to teach her to make a quilt. That way I can see that she has plenty of milk and eggs and fruit and vegetables. Elly looked just like that before she got sick and died."

Elly was her youngest sister and my old woman never did really forget her. Even after all these years I would sometimes hear her in the middle of the night when she would get up and go into the living room to cry. She knew better than to awaken me with something like that. I never told her I heard her because she would have cried more and I needed my sleep.

"I won't let that happen to Mrs. Rollins," she said.

I had to stomp around and grumble about not having time for such foolishness and hurry out of the house so my old woman wouldn't see how glad I was about everything. I went up to look at the hill and the

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perfume of thinking about Mrs. Rollins seemed to spread all over the hills and down over the grove and the chicken runs and my house and even the old woman in the yard taking down the morning wash.

The next day was Saturday so I told my old woman I could just as well get the piano today if she would watch the chickens and the highway stand. She said it was about time I decided to act like a neighbor and not like a bear.

I spread a clean blanket over the seat of the pickup and when Mrs. Rollins climbed in her wide skirt spread out and she sat like a queen in a carriage. I wished it were a carriage. Since it wasn't I drove slowly so she wouldn't be bumped to pieces. I would have worn my good suit but my old woman would have made fun of me. I did have on a clean shirt and clean denims and I managed to sneak a bottle of wine under the seat before I took the truck out.

She was so friendly and smiling and talked so gently. I felt so *good*. I wanted to sing but I couldn't sing and I didn't want to scare her so she wouldn't talk to me at all. I wished I owned the whole valley and all the hills so I could give all of it to her. I felt like jumping high—high as a tree top.

I wouldn't look at her because I might have run off the road. I didn't want to ask her about her husband because if he was dead or a criminal she would have felt sad. So I pointed to the hills and the trees and asked her if she didn't think they were pretty. She said "Yes" and the one word was enough. It had a lilt that said much more.

As we went through the gorge she looked at the cliffs crowding close to the road and smiled and when we got to the place where a small shallow pool made a swimming place there were half a dozen youngsters playing in the water. We could hear them laughing and shouting and she looked sad for just a second and then she smiled and waved to them. If I hadn't happened to be going very slowly and watching her face I would have missed that small shadow.

A couple of miles on there was a narrow rutted track leading off the road to a stand of big trees. When we turned into the track Mrs. Rollins wanted to know where we were going and I told her I wanted to show her the trees and come right back to the road. The track curved sharply and we were in a clearing completely out of sight of the highway traffic. Here long ago there had been a rock

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slide and the boulders were heaped so that the water rushed and fell like thunder and hurled fine spray into the air so that on the hottest days the clearing was cool. I turned the pickup to face the way we had come and asked her to step out for a minute.

"I'd rather go on for the piano," she said. Her voice was even and smooth but she did not smile.

"Nothing's going to hurt you," I said. "Come on and see the falls. You'll like that."

"Some other time," she said. "We could all three of us come for a picnic."

She actually thought I would bring my old woman here with her.

"Sure," I said. "But right now there's something under the seat that I want."

She probably thought I wanted some kind of a tool so she got out without a word. The wine bottle was still half full and I offered her some but she looked scared and said it wasn't good for her.

"Don't worry," I said. "I'm not going to hurt you. I only want to show you the water and the trees. Let's sit here for a minute."

I pulled the blanket from the seat and spread it in the shade. I made myself comfortable and had a big swallow of the wine. I already felt good but now I felt my heart would burst open with goodness. I looked around for her and she was standing by the truck.

"I'm going to sell my place and I'll have a lot of money," I said. "I'm going to give it all to you."

She pretended to laugh as if I had made a joke.

"Look," I said. "I'll give you everything you could want. I'm not so bad. In Phoenix—I wouldn't go out to feed the chickens in clothes like this."

I couldn't see her so good. Her white face made me think of a flower and her eyes looked enormous. Her mouth was a blur and I had to touch her. I wasn't going to hurt her when I got up and started toward her but she moved away. I grabbed her shoulders and looked close at her face. Her mouth was open a little and she may have been trying to say something but I couldn't hear above the noise of the water. Her shoulder bones felt so small I knew I'd have to be careful not to break them.

She surprised me then. She gave such a sudden twist to her whole body and her muscles felt like steel and I tightened my grip with one arm around her shoulders and the other at her waist, holding one arm and pinning the other against her.

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She felt hard and strong and sweet like wine.

Then suddenly she was soft and yielding so I gathered her into my arms and put her down on the blanket gently. There was a thick layer of leaves under the blanket and I pushed some of them higher to make a soft pillow. She was so beautiful I couldn't breathe and my fingers were all thumbs. The noise of the water was unbearable and her bare legs were curved as I thought they'd be. Her hair was fragrant like flowers and my own blood felt like bursting. . .

There was quiet. Too quiet. Even the water was quiet. Her skirt and blouse were crumpled. She was so still. Her mouth was white and her hair looked as dead as the leaves.

I brought water in my hands to bathe her face and hands and rub her wrists. I got my hat from the truck for the water but it didn't help. I tried to cool the wine bottle in the water but it slipped out of my hands and broke on the boulders. I pulled her up to a sitting position but she sagged as soon as I let go.

All the time I was talking to her and trying to wake her up. Trying to make her hear me. Trying to tell her we had to go. Nothing did any good.

I had to get away. I remembered the blanket and moved her to the leaves and tucked her skirt around her. I didn't think. I started for Phoenix and the rest you know. If my old woman hadn't told that Deputy about Phoenix I wouldn't be here.

How long has it been? Three years or four? Or five? I lost track of time in the sameness of the days until last week.

Last week a different man talked to me and it was very strange. He didn't ask me about anything. He looked at me for a long time and then turned to the barred window. While he stood there looking away from me I had a strong feeling that I knew him and that he was my friend.

Then it came to me. His eyes made me remember the hill. It was not the shape of the hill or the changing light or the colors. It was the feeling of freedom and peace.

I was marveling at this thought when he spoke my name. I answered him and he put his hand on my shoulder with a strong firm clasp. It was the first time anyone had touched me with friendliness in years. The first time since long before *that* happened and I cried like a child. I was not ashamed. I put my hands over my face and rocked back and

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forth, trying not to make a noise.

I remembered a place in my childhood in the hills when I was taken to a church set in the woods. In that church had been what was called a mourners' bench for those repenting their sins. I can't possibly think what sins .children could have committed but we wept then just as I was weeping now.

At last I had no more tears and I stood up to go. I wanted to say something to him but there was no need. He was smiling at me and there was a kindness in his face that seemed to tell me he knew all I could tell him and more I could not or would not tell even to myself. He gave me the Book I have been reading. Some of it I remember from childhood but much of it is new. The things I remember I read again as if they, too, are new.

In the shop I am making a tooled leather bag and on the leather is a design of a rose tree in bloom. If I knew where my wife is now I would send it to her to tell her I was wrong to ever blame her or anyone besides myself for anything I did and I hope she would know that I am sorry I didn't make the rose garden she wanted.

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This is the 381st "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine... Whatever the future of the "pure" detective short story (the "golden age" type of detective story as distinguished from the contemporary police procedural or the vérité or realistic story of today), the future of the crime short story is bright, perhaps brighter than ever before. Recent "first stories" in EQMM have been exceptionally good, and here is another fine example of the work of a new writer who, with other beginning writers, will undoubtedly contribute to the crime short story's shining future...

The author, Ruth Enos, has just passed 40 and has had an interesting background of work and experience: secretary, truck driver (!), bartender (!!), banquet hostess, sales manager, car-hop, B-girl (!!!), and telephone solicitor. "In all these pursuits," she wrote to us, "few were in any way gratifying" (but what stories she has to tell!), and she was sustained throughout by her "only hobby—reading." She reads everything—books, magazines, newspapers, leaflets, pamphlets, brochures, signs, box and can labels, "occupant's" mail, even graffiti.

And consider, all you who aspire to writing careers: "The Best of Accidents" was not only Ruth Enos' first submission for publication, it was also the first story she ever wrote!

THE BEST OF ACCIDENTS

by RUTH ENOS

John's throat felt tight and dry, but it wasn't caused by the dust rising around the wagon wheels. He looked down at his and Andy's brown, dirty feet, hanging limp like watch fobs from under their frayed overalls. The tailgate swung gently against their legs, keeping rhythm with the horses as

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they ground steadily homeward. Funny how six years made such a difference in feet. He could see the bones in his own, but Andy's were just short stubs, with little fat sausages for toes.

John couldn't recall if he had fat feet at the age of four or not. He probably had. After all, they were brothers, and Ma said they favored each other a lot. Andy's cotton head brushed against his shoulder, and John wondered why his own hair had turned darker. But his face was slimmer and his nose more pointed too, so he guesssed that when you get older, you changed all over.

He knew Andy wanted to say something to him, but it wasn't safe, so he pretended to be interested in the lush green fields they were passing. However, the thought of the pale strained face beside him made him uncomfortable, and he took the small chubby hand lying tense on the splintery wagon beds and gave it a quick squeeze.

"John, did you git the fence fixed around them pigs?"

John's lean body tensed, as it always did when Henry spoke to him. "Yessir, P-Pa, I fixed it this mornin'." He had difficulty calling Henry Pa, because he could remember his real father, and *he* wasn't a bit like Henry.

"Did you put them tools back where they belonged?" Henry's voice was low and flat, even when he asked questions. He never raised his voice when he was mad either, but his tanned face turned darker, and his eyes half closed. Otherwise, his expression didn't change.

"Yessir," John lied. He had forgotten again, and that alone was enough to make Henry furious. John glanced over his shoulder at Ma, riding beside Henry on the wagon seat. She didn't say anything, but John knew she was thinking hard, because she sat so still. Her shoulders were slumped, and wisps of her fair hair had come loose from the precise braids that encircled her head.

Ma was a strong woman, with the square hips and broad shoulders that were suited to farm chores. Her features were even, but continous exposure to the weather had roughened her skin, and her deep-blue eyes seemed to focus inward on some secret sorrow that tightened the corners of her mouth. John hoped she could help him this time.

He thought about the day, a year ago, when Henry had first come to the farm. John was nailing down some loose boards in the front porch when he heard a wagon approaching from the main road. The driver

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was a thick-set, dark-haired man in his mid-thirties, with a closed, secretive face. When he spoke, his narrow lips opened just wide enough to let a few words escape.

The stranger asked for Ma, and when John said he'd fetch her, the man got down from the wagon with carefully deliberate movements, as if he were fearful of wasting motion. When Ma came out, he said he'd heard in town that she was looking for a foreman, and though he'd been working at Mr. Wheeler's place, Mr. Wheeler wouldn't mind if he came to work for her.

Ma was grateful to Mr. Wheeler because good foremen were scarce these days, and she hadn't been able to make the farm produce like Pa had. She had one of the largest beet farms in Colorado, and employed two hired hands full time, and more during the harvest season. Charlie and Clyde, the hired hands, didn't live at the farm, although they took their noon meal there. They had their own houses and families about a mile down the main road, which was just outside the entrance to the farm. There were storage rooms in the barn though, and Ma told Henry to fix up the one with the window for sleeping, and he could eat with the family.

The farmhouse was small and square, with the living room and bedroom side by side. The kitchen was behind the living room, and Pa had knocked out the wall to the room beside it, to make enough space for the large dining table needed during harvest season. The screened-in porch ran across the back of the house, with the well behind the kitchen and a cellar underneath. Pa had made John and Andy a room upstairs in the attic, where the roof came to a point, and built a staircase that led up from the living room.

When Charlie brought Henry and his gear over from Mr. Wheeler's farm, Henry had a big wooden trunk with a padlock on it which fascinated John and Andy. One Sunday evening the two boys hid in the hayloft and peeped through the cracks between the boards, down into Henry's room. Henry had opened the trunk, which was half full of women's clothes, and was gently stroking them, crooning wordlessly. He took off his clothes and put them on his cot, and taking out dresses one at a time he drew them across his body. John and Andy thought it was the funniest sight they'd ever seen and had to hold their mouths to keep from laughing out aloud. They didn't tell Ma about it, because

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she wouldn't approve of them spying on Henry.

Henry was a good worker, and showed Ma many ways she could save money, so that she came to depend on him, and was glad to give up the burden of running the farm by herself. He was a quiet man, and seldom went into town, even though he was single. The hired hands didn't like him much, but he managed the farm so well that it was soon running as smooth as when Pa was alive.

Folks kept telling Ma how lucky she was to have Henry taking care of things, and that she ought to start thinking seriously about getting a man to help her raise the boys, until finally they convinced her. She and Henry were married within eight months from the time he came to the farm.

John was surprised when Henry didn't move his belongings up to the house after the wedding guests were gone, but maybe the second time you got married, things were different. That night after supper, when Henry had gone to the barn as usual, Ma sent John and Andy up to bed. Presently John heard the screen door slam on the back porch, and watching from his window he saw Ma walking the fifty yards to the barn.

The next morning when John came down to breakfast, Ma's face was swollen and her left eye was turning black. Henry was eating as though nothing had happened, so John didn't mention it until Henry had left. She told him she had tripped in the barn and hit her head against a stall, but she seemed bewildered, so for a few nights John listened, but he didn't hear her going out to the barn any more.

Henry continued to live in the barn, and occasionally John and Andy lay in the hayloft and watched him stroke the clothes, but Henry never did anything different, and they soon were bored with the performance.

Henry was mending harness in the back yard two months after the wedding and John had gone to the barn to look for his pet biddy hen when he noticed that Henry's door was ajar. The trunk was pulled out, and the lock was lying beside it. Wanting to see the clothing up close, John entered the room and cautiously raised the lid. He heard an outraged roar behind him, and awoke with his head bandaged and Ma sitting on the bed holding his hand, crying silently. Dr. Caldwell stretched back John's eyelids and told him to look quickly from one side of the room to the other, then lectured him about playing in the hayloft.

After Dr. Caldwell had left,

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John told Ma about Henry's trunk, and that he hadn't meant to hurt the clothes; he only wanted to look at them. Ma was puzzled, and said he was to stay away from the barn, and keep Andy away too, while she tried to figure it out. John stayed in bed over a week, until the dizziness and nausea subsided.

From then on Ma was different. She didn't hold with a lot of talking anyhow, but she used to sit on the front porch some summer evenings and talk about the times when she was a little girl, and sing gospel songs while she rocked Andy to sleep. She spoke only when it was absolutely necessary, and sent John and Andy to bed right after supper. They didn't tell Andy about the "accident" because he was so young, but John kept Andy with him as much as possible, and told him to stay out of the barn.

They were passing Charlie's house now, and Charlie's wife waved to them from one of the windows. Maybe Charlie could help, but John didn't know which field Charlie was working in today. If only Pa hadn't died! He still didn't see how a man as big and strong as Pa could die from a nail scratch. You'd think that in 1926 there'd be a medicine for every germ.

One of the horses lurched abruptly, and the wagon briefly picked up speed, but Henry's short strong hands jerked savagely on the reins and swiftly pulled them back to an even trot. It was that crazy old Buck again. That horse shied at any sudden noise or quick movement and was always trying to drag them off the road. They had other horses, but Henry was determined to break Buck of the habit, and insisted on using him to draw the wagon. Henry might be a good farmer, but he didn't know a thing about horses.

The wagon turned off the main road, and John jumped down to open the gate to their own road. After the wagon had passed through, John climbed back up next to Andy and put his arm around him. Andy was becoming more upset as they neared the house, and John was afraid he'd start bawling. Then Henry would know something was wrong for sure.

Ordinarily John was happy to get home from a trip to town. Henry always made them stay in the wagon while he and Ma bought supplies, so it wasn't any fun to go along. If Ma managed to buy them a sweet, she wouldn't sneak it to them until she came upstairs to tuck them in for the night. Henry didn't believe in special treats.

The summer sun was so low

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that it shone through the brush by the roadside, turning it golden. On either side, as far as John could see, were fields of sugar beets. Their long rich leaves formed a brilliant green sea around the island of the house and outbuildings. The leaves grew down behind the barn for 400 yards, until they were dammed by an aspen grove at the beginning of the Rocky Mountain foothills.

John stared at the aspen grove bitterly. Down there, in the deepest part of the creek that flowed through the trees, were the charred remains of Henry's secret passion. While John was mending the hog pen this morning, Andy had been hanging around, asking how John had fallen out of the hayloft and if that was why they couldn't play in the barn. He was being such a pest that John told him what had really happened, hoping to frighten him silent.

But when John had finished his chore, Andy was missing. He found him by the creek, standing proudly over the smoking clumps of Henry's ladies' clothing. Henry had put a padlock on the door to his room, so Andy had crawled through the window, and thrown the clothes into Ma's wash basket under the window, and dragged it to the creek. Andy said that would teach Henry not to hit John. John was so horrified he burst into tears, and Andy, realizing he had done a bad thing, cried too.

The dinner bell rang and they ran frantically all the way to the house and gasped out the dreadful news. Ma shushed them when she heard the screen door slam and Henry's heavy tread on the back porch, and busied herself about the kitchen. They heard Henry grunting as he washed in the basin by the well, and John kicked Andy under the table, trying to startle him, so his lips would stop trembling. John knew they had to be careful, even though Henry never looked at their faces; he gazed somewhere above their heads when he spoke to them. But the hired hands would be coming soon, and they might tease Andy. It would take very little teasing to make Andy blurt out everything.

Henry strode to the table, and, after filling his plate from the dishes in front of him, demanded the bread. Flustered, Ma hurried from the stove, and offered him the slightly overbrowned biscuits. He frowned, but for a change didn't complain. She was so nervous she forgot to pass the bread to John and Andy.

"Henry, why don't we go

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into town after dinner and get the feed and groceries? Mrs. Hawkins said she would give us a discount on some meal that's getting old, if we could pick it up this week." Ma stood rigid, hoping the lure of saving money would persuade him.

Henry's low hairline dipped deeper in concentration and made his broad face seem wider. With his thick chest and broad shoulders he appeared much taller, when he was seated, than he actually was. He stayed crouched over his plate, not raising his eyes, stolidly eating, until he finally answered indirectly, "John, when you git done eatin', hitch up the horses."

The relief John felt affected his voice as he quavered, "Yessir!" He gulped the rest of his dinner and raced for the pasture, carrying two halter ropes. He had to lead the horses to the house and get the harness before Henry left the table, or Henry might wander out to the barn. Fortunately, Henry remained true to his appetite, and John was waiting by the wagon when Henry came down the back steps.

They had gained a few hours, thanks to Ma's fast thinking, yet when they drove back behind the house that evening John was despondent, for nothing had really changed. Ma told him to take Andy upstairs and play with him while she helped Henry unload the wagon. John searched her face so desperately, hoping for some sign that she had a plan, that she took him into the kitchen and told him reassuringly, "I'll handle it, John, don't worry." She picked up her dish towel and began to dry some plates left from dinner, and stared grimly out the back porch at Henry, unharnessing the horses.

John tried to believe her, but when they went to their room Andy's alarmed expression as he cried, "John, will he kill us all?" destroyed what little courage John was able to summon, and he quivered with fear.

Suddenly, through the open window, he heard a sharp crack like a rifle shot, followed by a horse's whinny, and the rumble of a runaway wagon. There were shouts and screams, and then the rattle of the wagon gradually faded away into the distance.

"Buck!" John ran to the small window that overlooked the yard back of the house. Henry's torn, bleeding body was lying in the dust. John pushed Andy back and watched as Ma and Charlie knelt by the inert form and listened for a heartbeat. John gazed at

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Henry's body, anticipating a pleasant sense of retribution, but his overworked emotions wouldn't respond, and he felt nothing at all. He saw the horses and wagon tearing through the fields toward the creek and wondered casually at the damage they were doing. He supposed they'd shoot Buck.

Charlie and Clyde spread a sheet over Henry and took him into town in the retrieved wagon. When they returned, they said the sheriff would come out tomorrow and take statements from everyone. When Ma sent John and Andy up to bed that night she told them to pray for Henry's soul. Instead, John prayed that the sheriff wasn't too smart a man.

Sheriff Peters was a tall, slender, gray-haired man, with quick blue eyes that ran in all directions while he stood still. He moseyed about the farm the next day, talking first with Ma, then with the hands, and finally with John and Andy. He asked questions slowly and carelessly, as if the answers didn't matter, but John was careful just the same. The sheriff told Ma he had been over to Mr. Wheeler's place and had talked to the hired hands there. One of the hands had known Henry for years, he said, and sometimes accidents happened for the best.

Three days after the funeral an inquest was held. The sheriff gave his testimony that Henry must have been standing in front of the horses when the shot was fired, and the loaded wagon had passed over him, killing him instantly. He said he had examined the two guns at the farm, but neither had been fired recently. Charlie added that although he had been working near the barn and heard the shot, he hadn't seen where it came from. No one in the area had seen anyone with a rifle that afternoon, so the coroner ruled that due to lack of evidence to the contrary, the verdict was accidental death.

Ma had taken John and Andy to the inquest, but none of them was called as a witness, since they had all been in the house when it happened. On the ride back home John noticed that Ma was still troubled, so to ease her mind he brought up the subject of the rifle shot. "You know, I bet it was one of them Davis boys, target practising down by the crick. Some days, when the wind is blowing just right, you can hear the water running while you're standing on the back porch."

Ma laughed, and the sound was so startling in its newness that Andy's head jerked up, and he laughed too. "Well, it's all

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over and done with now, and we'll have to forget it and go on. I'll need a lot of help from you boys, but I know I can depend on you."

She snapped the reins, and as the horses spurted forward her back straightened and her face relaxed, making her seem younger, almost pretty.

John watched her out of the corner of his eye, proud of her confidence. He knew he could never tell Ma or anbody else that he had recognized that rifle shot. He'd been hearing it every day for so long that he didn't notice it unless he listened real close. Because, when Ma shook out her dishcloth, she cracked it like a whip and it sounded like a rifle shot, and that evening she had shaken it on the back porch.

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Winner of FIRST PRIZE in

CWA's short-story contest

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In 1971 Michael Gilbert, a regular contributor to EQMM, suggested that Crime Writers Association of London run a short-story contest. The winning entry was Jeffry Scott's "Trip Up on a Ripple," about Inspector Lochiel of the Rosetta Street-Great Northern Avenue-Cap-a-Pie Lane district.

You will find Inspector Lochiel a one-hundred-percent English detective, in this case that took place when he was a young Detective Constable. You couldn't possibly think of him as anything but English—no more than you could think of, say, Dorothy L. Sayers's Lord Peter Wimsey as anything but English, or Maurice Leblanc's Arsene Lupin as anything but French, or Dashiell Hammett's Sam Spade as anything but American. And for change of reading pace none of us would want it any other way . . .

TRIP UP ON A RIPPLE

by JEFFRY SCOTT

The thing about Minifee—Inspector Lochiel explains—is that the man was a snout.

A damp, sensitive, pink, hungry snout. Or to be polite, an informer. Drop a pin *here* (a certain type of pin, released by a particular set of fingers) and Minifee would hear the impact *there.*

Inspector Lochiel has a boring face which makes him difficult to remember and accounts for much of his success. Imagine an egg left on a shelf beside a marble portrait bust for so long that, by some kind of sympathetic magic, it acquires a semblance of human features: you are contemplating Inspector Lochiel.

Even Minifee forgot about

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him for minutes on end, even while the young Detective Constable was at his elbow, and Minifee was no fool.

Lochiel gets around a lot, but not half as much as he did in the late 1940s, when his warrant card was spanking new. That was how he spotted and cultivated Emerald. However, this story is devious enough in its way, without juggling the time sequence. Start at the beginning and return to Minifee, whose pleasure and business was minding other people's.

A final word, though, about Inspector Lochiel. He reads a lot, but tends to forget details. He tells me of a scientific theory about ripples never ending. Drop a pebble in the tide at Dover, and there are implications for the San Francisco coastline. This seems unlikely—Lochiel may have got it wrong—but he derives great comfort from the thought.

"It means," he lectures, "that everything we do, however meaningless, *does* have significance. To advance it a step, anything a villain does has a sporting chance of hitting him smartly in the back of the neck. The way crime figures are going, we should thank our lucky stars for help of any kind—even ripples."

Lochiel also read—in a book by W. Somerset Maugham, he thinks—that the happiness of any two linked persons can be achieved only at the expense of a third.

If neither of these theories impresses you with its manifest truth and wisdom, Inspector Lochiel will recall the Minifee Saga, as he did to me.

George Albert Samuel Minifee, informer by appointment to sundry policemen working the triangle formed by Rosetta Street, Great Northern Avenue, and Cap-a-Pie Lane in the City of London. A shabby but quite wealthy district, full of warehouses, furriers, manufacturing jewelers, and the like.

Most snouts work for one detective, in a form of commercial marriage, but Minifee was promiscuous; he liked to spread his favors—to go courting, as it were. Very democratic, he'd even put trifles in the way of ambitious lads in the uniformed branch. No C.I.D.-only snobbery for him.

"Now here's a funny thing," says Lochiel. "Minifee didn't have a great sign outside his shop with INFORMATION STOLEN AND SOLD on it, but I'm sure that most of the Rosetta Street hounds guessed he was a snout. Did they steer clear of the bloke or give him a damned good spanking? Not on

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your life! He might run a tobacco and sweet shop, but it was more like a social club. Drop in for an ounce of 'baccy or a bar of chocolate and you'd generally find a few villains in the queue."

Lochiel suspects that Minifee never informed on a friend, a near neighbor, or a regular customer. As the earthy old proverb goes, a wise dog does not foul its own doorstep.

Moreover, Minifee stocked pornographic magazines in the shop's back room. Toward evening, home-going clerks would slip past the upraised counter flap, emerging pink around the ears and poorer by a pound or so.

The stuff was mild by today's standards, of course. But a couple of decades ago the neighborhood accepted the fact that if Minifee was left in peace to peddle *Maids in Bondage* and *Satin Sin*, he must have earned the privilege with bribes or cooperation.

In fact, his police tips gained considerably more than an unwritten license to fray the moral fiber of sprigs of the City scene. Many a mickle, and so forth—thirty shillings here, two pounds there, a fiver on occasion. . .

Minifee's customers gossiped, usually from the corners of their mouths. What they did not say, he had a knack of sensing. Careless talk, the bane of good security: Billy looking too prosperous, Ted losing his rent money at the dogs, Edgar not turning up t'other night to collect that free pint.

"Get away" or "Believe that, you'll swallow anything," Minifee would chortle. But having pondered and flicked through his mental filing cabinet, he was ready for business with his legal cronies.

"He'd have been a bloody good thief-taker, I promise you," says Inspector Lochiel. "Enjoyed deduction; given a different environment, another start in life, he could have been my boss. Me calling Minifee *sir* and standing up when he came into the interview room."

Lochiel detested the fellow. No reason in the world—simply a case of dislike at first sight. If anything, Minifee went out of his way to be pleasant to the raw young D.C. with the disconcerting habit of blending with the wallpaper. "You want to ask Barry Tredgold what he's got in that lock-up garage of his," Minifee advised one day, as he sold Lochiel a cigarette machine and a packet of papers. "Better yet, stroll round there tonight. You might see some—er—Christmas parcels arriving."

Lochiel's visit to the wretched Tredgold was well

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rewarded. And since a detective without an informer is like a pretty girl with a poor complexion, Lochiel concealed his dislike.

"I buttered the old swine up," he admits. "The best butter, too, à la *Alice in Wonderland*. The Skipper let me bung my informant a few quid out of the fund, for Tredgold, but I raided my own Post Office Savings book to show Minifee I was grateful.

"I met him at The Other Pub—you know, far side of Rosetta Street, well away from the manor—the night after I'd felt Tredgold's collar. Minifee was a widower and spent most of his free time in pubs. We went into the Gents and I passed him the cash. 'Very nice of you,' says Minifee, 'but I'd have given you a leg up, anyway. I'd be proud of a son like you, straight I would.'"

This confused and angered young Lochiel, for reasons he was unable to analyze. He resolved to keep an eye on Minifee, while using his services.

Actually, Minifee had a son of his own, and one to be proud of. The lad was an engineering apprentice at Derby, talented and well thought of, who hitchhiked home to London on frequent weekends.

As I have indicated, Lochiel is unobtrusive enough to make paving stones or lampposts positively bizarre by comparison. He was always wandering into Minifee's shop, to the point where its owner ignored him.

And so the detective had a chance to talk to Emerald.

She looked after the shop when Minifee popped out to place a bet with one of the district's legion of furtive and illegal bookies' runners, or to take his lunchtime beer. He was rather good at popping out for a minute which stretched to thirty or more.

Emerald, living around the corner and too idle to keep a regular job, made an ideal recruit.

"Strange, what makes a girl attractive," Lochiel muses. "Her name was the fanciest thing about her. See her photograph and you'd dismiss her as a—what's the current slang?—a scrubber. I suppose she *was* a scrubber.

"About seventeen, eighteen, with that sallow skin that always looks as though it could do with a wash. But lord, you couldn't come within six feet without wanting to touch her. Not that Emerald was easy. She liked talking about sex, hinting and joking, and that's a bad sign. A teaser, worried if you didn't go after her and hard as nails if you did."

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Lochiel soon found that she was as shrewdly inquisitive as her part-time employer. "She'd seen me going in and out of the Rosetta Street nick at all hours, which made me a copper. And she had a good idea that Minifee was a snout. Naturally, I laughed her off."

Emerald was irritated by the reaction. "Look, cleverboots, he doesn't run a cabin cruiser on what he takes here over the counter," she snapped. "Even with his dirty pictures on the side, and all." And she struck a parody-provocative pose, drawing up the hem of her cheap dress.

Lochiel averted his eyes from suspender straps and a pale blade of thigh. "Cabin cruiser?" he jeered.

"Saw him down Teddington way last Whitsun," Emerald explained. "He didn't see me. Too busy playing Admiral Minifee on his precious boat. Must have cost him a pretty penny, 'cos I saw a picture of James Mason with exactly the same kind of cabin cruiser in *Screenworld* last week. A luxury cabin cruiser, see."

"What was it called, *The Victory?*"

But Lochiel wasn't getting all his work done for him. The girl couldn't remember the name on the boat's stern. He changed the subject.

"Go to the pictures with a copper? I got my reputation to consider," Emerald sniffed. "Listen, I hear things. All the blokes who take me out, they've got form, or mates with form. If I passed it on, like old Minifee does, could I make—you know, make myself a bob or two?"

"It's your duty to inform the police," Lochiel replied dampeningly. "Anyway, I don't work for the Vice Squad, love." And he slipped out on the wake of a delighted whinny.

The nearest newsstand sold him the current issue of *Screenworld* magazine, and he studied the photograph of Mr. Mason, afloat. A distinctive cabin cruiser, certainly; but "Teddington way" is a flexible area, and the Thames a long, long river. . .

Lochiel was courting a very plain, very pleasant probationer nurse (marrying her in 1952) and the next few dates took them cycling solemnly along towpaths and riverside lanes. Eventually they found the cabin cruiser, which led to a bungalow, which led to a talkative neighbor.

Back in the Rosetta Street-Great Northern Avenue-Cap-a-Pie Lane district, Minifee made no secret of enjoying Sunday roast and two veg with a married sister who lived at

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Streatham. He vanished after locking up the shop on Saturday evenings—unless his son was at home for the weekend—to reappear on Monday mornings.

Yet it would not be true to record that Lochiel was astonished to confirm that the snout's off-time was spent at Teddington, not at Streatham. At Teddington he was known as Morris, Samuel Morris, someone in the leather trade, running not only the cabin cruiser but a large bungalow and a new car at least four feet too long for its prewar garage.

"I'd guessed there was something off-center about Minifee," Lochiel comments. "It had niggled me, why he shut the shop on Sundays and lost all that trade. Him not being averse to a profit."

Said the probationer nurse, "What luck, the boat really being a twin of the one in the magazine."

"Emerald has a literal mind—if she said it was the same, that's good enough for me," her fiancé explained. He spoke absently, for he was far from satisfied.

All very well in its way, the knowledge of Minifee's double identities and lives. As far as it went, which was not nearly as far as Lochiel wished.

Weeks passed, becoming seasons, while Lochiel earned his pay and profited from Minifee's semiprofessional curiosity and sparred with Emerald. "I'll make you take notice some day," she shined. "Don't see why *I* shouldn't make a bit o' money." She produced the final word as frailer girls would say "love" or "marriage."

"I daresay you will," Lochiel agreed, trusting he was correct in his forecast.

There was a boy called Eddie, serious, clever, and besotted with Emerald. He gave her things, she saw to that. Quite expensive things, which simply whetted her appetite for more.

Lochiel, armored and enlightened by real love, observed and pitied him. Emerald, not caring a straw, pretended to be jealous, and Eddie gave her presents. It was sad.

"I wasn't *that* sentimental," Lochiel confesses. "I got worried because the way he was pouring out his money on her Emerald might forget about selling information to me. I was counting on her doing that, in the end. But the more Eddie spent, the less likely it became. I never stopped to ask myself how—" Here Inspector Lochiel pulls himself up, looks sly, and starts again.

Came the night when Emerald went to meet Eddie at the

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Odeon cinema (now a discount store) on the corner of Great Northern Avenue and Rosetta Street. He was due at eight o'clock. By nine Emerald knew that she had been stood up.

Double disaster: a personal snub, plus the end of nylons and trinkets, chocolates, and perfume in fancy bottles. She no longer needed to feign jealousy and possessiveness. Emerald hurried home, past Minifee's shuttered shop with the radio muttering away in the snuggery in the back, where he must be drowsing among the dirty magazines and jars of sweets.

She glared at the place, and the way it mocked her mood with those cheery cracks of light around the shutters. All right for him, smarmy old fool, feet up and money in the bank!

Emerald's parents were out, so there was nobody for her to rage at, and she too was listening to the radio when the knocking started. Frantic knocking. Eddie pushed past her to dart down the passage the moment the front door came off the latch.

"Don't come sniffing round me, you sod!" She was nearly hysterical from wounded vanity and thwarted greed.

"Listen," Eddie blurted, "you've got to listen!" Disconcertingly he appeared to forget what he meant to say, leaving her staring for a quarter of a minute. Then: "Good lord, the blood and the way he shouted. Any tea in the pot? I'm parched." All in the same crazy rush of breath.

"You've been out with another girl. Saying you love me and all that moody, and you go chasing after the first tart that—"

Emerald clawed at his face and he caught her hands; now, as she wrenched free, their fingers parted with a strange, sticky reluctance that made her gasp and shudder. Her fingers were stained from his grip. She fell silent but could hear her heart.

Eddie sat by the coal fire, radio still babbling from its perch above him. His tone was so quiet the words were hard to catch.

"It was awful, Em. Went all right, first off. Platinum scrap, piece of cake, I'd loaded it all in the van, no trouble. But he would go back. Looking for the float, the petty cash, see. Greedy, stupid-greedy. This old chap, the night watchman, he must have been asleep when we broke in. There wasn't supposed to be a night watchman —we'd checked and checked."

"You've been doing a job," Emerald whispered, not quite believing it, not yet. "Eddie,

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you've been doing a job."

"Of course I have. Where'd you think I get the money for all your stuff? Where'd you think *he* gets the money?" Eddie jerked his chin sideways. "Doesn't grow on trees. He kept hitting the old bloke. Well, he had to, like. Getting away, the feller held on like a bulldog."

Eddie blinked and lurched out to the kitchen, cupping his palms under the cold tap to drink the best part of a pint of water. "Here," he said belatedly, "don't you go talking about this, Em. I had to tell somebody, see. At least I wasn't cheating on you, I was out working. But you mustn't let on."

Emerald, wiping the stained hands on her skirt, proved her true caliber. "You're having me on. You were out with some tart. I'm not daft, chum."

He shook his head. "Look, I can take you to the place—we'll walk past like we're going home. The law will be there by now, you can see them. I phoned 999. For the old chap, in case he was still—" Eddie's voice broke. "He won't be, he's dead. I tried to help, sat him up—afterwards. It wasn't me, Em, it wasn't me that did it!"

Emerald was considering how to get an answer without unveiling the crucial question. She put her arms around him, still framing the most cunning approach. "Of course it wasn't, darlin', you're not that sort."

Her heart was hammering, her throat had tightened, but she managed to play the ace. "You'll be all right, John Law won't get you. Providing your mate doesn't blab. The bloke with you, the one that mur—that did it. Is he safe, Eddie? Will he let you down?"

Eddie looked blank, even faintly irritated at her stupidity. And he walked into the trap. "Give over, Em. Safe? It was my Dad with me, I always go with my Dad."

An hour later Emerald was at the police station, trying to bargain with Inspector Lochiel for two names. Ninety minutes later Eddie was under arrest.

Along with Dad, his father, George Albert Samuel Minifee.

"It stood to reason—once we knew," says Lochiel. "That cabin cruiser at Teddington cost a small fortune. The bungalow rent was plenty, the car set Minifee back a bundle, to say nothing of running costs. And Minifee was always standing drinks in the pubs during the week. I'd done my sums as best I could. When one added his shop income to what he made as a snout, there was still an interesting amount, like, *outstanding*—to make sense of his spending patterns.

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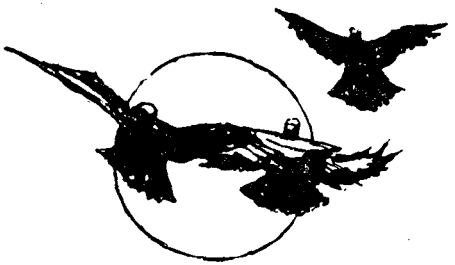
"Personally, I'd fancied him for a receiver—stolen cigarettes, for instance, sold through his shop. I was gently checking Minifee's wholesalers' invoices against his stock when Emerald came to us. He was a burglar, of course, nothing more nor less. The son's engineering skill helped when they had to crack a lock or do a neat bit of cutting."

Ripples, says Inspector Lochiel. Minifee the informer, planting the idea of a similar trade in Emerald's treacherous mind. Emerald, living nearby, always around the shop, fated to hook Minifee's son. The son so infatuated, so obsessed with soothing her jealousy, that he sees nothing monstrous in using murder as proof of his love. Ripples.

As for the happiness theory. . .

"That worked out as well," Lochiel argues. "Eddie was happy, for all of an hour, convincing Emerald he hadn't been unfaithful to her. And she was happy as a pig in clover, getting two villains to sell to us."

Then he considers the third person, the payer-for-happiness. "The watchman died, right enough. So Minifee hanged. I'm not sure which of them was the third person. A high price for happiness, one way and another."



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THE JURY BOX

by JOHN DICKSON CARR

Once more, let it be said, I feel a certain disquiet. Of four new books to be recommended this month, three have been listed by the publishers as "novels of suspense," the fourth escaping that designation because it deals factually with one aspect of sensationalism in fiction. But those first three: "novels of suspense," are they? Sometimes I wonder if we shall ever be free of this dreary term.

No, it's not the first time I have been moved to remonstrance. Some weeks ago a New England correspondent asked questions.

"Frankly," he wrote, "what's wrong? Why your gripe against *calling* 'em novels of suspense? Can you give one good reason?"

Yes, if you care to listen. I say nothing of the fact that this term is the lazy man's way of ticketing every kind of blood and thunder, even when it contains about as much suspense as one of Aesop's fables. The real reason lies deeper.

Though any good mystery must contain the quality of suspense, that quality will be only one element among many. When you call the whole thing "a novel of suspense," you deliberately ignore the whole for one of its parts. It is as though the romance of Edwin and Angelina, ending in wedding bells, were to be described as "a novel of church history."

Never mind; let's proceed with this month's harvest.

Combining fast action-thriller with mystery against Air Force background, *Cornered at Six*, by Thomas Patrick McMahon and Major Brian Patrick McMahon, U.S.A.F. (Simon and Schuster, $6.95), admirably succeeds at both.

When a commercial airline hostess is messily slain at Floyd Bennett Field in New York, there seems only one possible culprit. Sergeant Willie Joe Kirk, Negro crew chief to General Sam Huston Stanton, that martinet two-star commander, has left incriminating evidence when he fled. General Stanton, politicking hard for a third star, will help his sergeant if it's convenient; otherwise, of course, Willie Joe must suffer.

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Apparently to help, the general sends Fighter Pilot Major Bill Bradley to find the missing man and hide him until this rumpus dies. Convinced of Sergeant Kirk's innocence, Bradley also becomes convinced that Willie Joe will be captured or gunned down before help can arrive. Assisted by Beth Ferguson, friend of the slain girl, Bradley plunges into explosive cross-country adventure climaxed by an air-sea rescue-trap which provides climax and explanation for a first-class problem in murder.

John D. MacDonald's *Bright Orange for the Shroud* (Lippincott, $5.95) again features likable Travis McGee, that somewhat tarnished knight errant whose affectation of cynicism never stops him from rescuing the helpless. Well-meaning Arthur Wilkinson has been robbed of his fortune by confidence crooks whose decoy lured Arthur into marriage.

It's a battle of giants when Travis McGee goes after 'em: crooks suave, crooks crude, and in particular Boone Waxwell, the most repulsive hobgoblin of recent fiction. Though by design the author offers little mystery, as usual he snares us with a roaring good story which grips at once and won't let go until the end.

John Miro, retired secret agent of Shaun Herron's *Through the Dark and Hairy Wood* (Random House, $5.95), now asks for little more than to live at peace with wife and son on his farm in republican Ireland.

But peace has been denied. Crossing the northern border to buy farm stock, at once he is swept up amid flying bullets and knives behind every hedgerow. With scant sympathy for either side, Miro fights to get home alive. How he solves the riddle of enigmatic Captain Strong adds impetus to a first-class adventure which is both full-blooded and full of blood in the best tradition.

Now for fact. *Cheap Thrills*, "An Informal History of the Pulp Magazines," by Ron Goulart (Arlington House, $7.95) graphically recreates the once mighty pulp empire, whose gaudy colors blazed from every newsstand until various economic factors destroyed it after World War II.

Cheap only in being modestly priced, it provided excitement for the youthful or the stay-at-home, instilling a morality as rigid as any Sunday School's. Despite stories of every kind, love or sport or war, so many featured mystery that we may consider this category on its own. Naive plots or not, perhaps something may be lacking in a day when fiction has become only an interlude between commercials. *Ave atque vale;* likewise, *eheu fugaces!*

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a NEW story by

LAWRENCE TREAT

Another devil story? Another Faustian fantasy in which someone exchanges his soul for the granting of three wishes? Yes—but this time devil-detection with a "difference"...

GIVE THE DEVIL HIS DUE

by LAWRENCE TREAT

When Dr. Ira Frost, psychiatrist, returned to his office after lunch on that particular Tuesday, he faced himself sitting in his chair at his own desk. Naturally he was taken aback.

"Who," he said, "are you? And how did you get in here?"

The stranger stood up. "Didn't mean to scare you," he said. "As to who I am—well, I have a great many names, and since people are pretty informal these days you can call me Lou. It's as good a name as any. As for how I got in, I'm afraid you wouldn't believe it even if I told you."

"Try me."

Lou shrugged. "If you wish. But, strictly speaking, I didn't get here at all. I"—and his mouth twisted up into a wry, sardonic smile—"I materialized."

"You bet I don't believe you," Ira said. "You're nothing but a damn hallucination. I guess I've been working too hard."

"Just like people these days to try and find an ordinary, prosaic explanation. Okay, then, explain this." He put his hand on the desk, which shot forth a spear of flame. The odor of brimstone was sharp and acrid.

"Lou?" Ira exclaimed. "Why, you're Lucifer!"

"Exactly. But you look a trifle pale, so why don't you sit down and relax? Then we can talk in comfort."

Warily Ira circled his desk and lowered himself into his chair. The seat was cold as ice, and he gave an involuntary shudder.

Lou laughed. "An old trick of mine—to startle people when

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they refuse to believe in me. But you seem to be taking things in stride, so I think we can get down to business."

"Which is?"

"Oh, come now, Dr. Faust. You realize—"

"Faust?" Ira said, interrupting. "My name's Frost."

"Of course. Just a slip of the tongue, Doctor." Lou eased himself onto the couch. "I was starting to say that this book you've been writing, about the devil in Twentieth Century literature—you've missed the boat."

"Impossible! I've been working on it for three years, I read two hundred and eighty-seven books. My bibliography is exhaustive, but it's true the publishers won't buy it. Why? Why?"

"Maybe I don't want it published," Lou said.

"Why not? What have you got against it?" Ira asked.

"You misrepresent me. You know what my main interest is, don't you?"

"Evil."

"Exactly. Evil and corruption. I buy souls. I match wits with humans who are in trouble or who think they're smarter than I am. But when you psychiatrists deny the whole doctrine of evil and replace it with some nonsensical notion of mental sickness, you're attacking my very existence."

"Good," Ira said. "You're on your way out."

"Not a bit of it. I haven't been getting much publicity lately because I was busy making a departmental overhaul and computerizing my business. Now that it's done I can get away from the office. And frankly I wish I never had to go back."

"What's the trouble?"

"The world's too impersonal. Right up into the Nineteenth Century I used to come and go freely. People saw me all the time, I was a well-known figure around town, and people gave me credit for every kind of disaster. But now I'm becoming anonymous."

"I'd put it differently," Ira said. "You're becoming obsolete."

"Nonsense!" Lou said sharply. "A war that killed off a few million, a world that's being ruined by Pollution, Overpopulation, and Drugs—POD. That's my POD program and I'm doing an outstanding job."

"I'll admit that the world is in pretty bad shape, but it doesn't follow that you're responsible for it. Give me one good reason for thinking that you are."

"You make my point nicely. Doctor, the whole trouble is that people no longer believe in"

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evil. They want reasons for everything, they're full of scientific explanations. People aren't immoral any more, they're psychologically sick. And they aren't stupid, they're underprivileged and mentally retarded. A whole profession—and a very prosperous one, as you well know—has been built on just that concept. So I thought I'd enjoy coming here and facing it out with a psychiatrist."

"Okay, but why me?"

"Because of that book of yours. It's full of scientific jargon that nobody but another psychiatrist can possibly understand. You make me look like a stuffed shirt, and I resent it."

"I didn't think I characterized you in such terms."

"You didn't characterize me at all. There's not a single sentence in the whole book that reflects my true point of view. You almost make sin seem unattractive."

"And that upsets you?"

"You bet it does. I'm a personality boy and I hate abstractions. While it's nice seeing rivers that nobody can drink from and beaches lined with oil slick, and while it's exhilarating to see people cough just from the air they breathe, I miss the person-to-person relationship, and that's why I'm here."

"I suppose," Ira said, "that you have some kind of proposition."

"Certainly. Doctor, do you believe you have a soul?"

"Me, fall for that religious clap trap? I gave it up while I was still in high school."

"I'm sorry about that," Lou said. "If you believed you had a soul, our conversation would get places much faster. The highest stake a human being can play for is the hereafter."

"You can have it," Ira said drily.

Lou leaped up from the couch. "Exactly!" he said. "That's what I'm aiming at. You get the now—anything you want in it—and I get the hereafter. Nicely put, Doctor. Occasionally you do manage to state things clearly, which is pretty rare in your trade."

"My profession, you mean."

"Have it your way," Lou said. "Anyhow, here's my offer: I give you three wishes, and in return you give me your soul."

"I have no soul."

"Your unconscious or superego or whatever you want to call it. I'll give you three wishes, and you give me your psyche. Is it a bargain?"

"I can't give you my psyche. By very definition my psyche is me. I can't separate it out, as if it were a thing."

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"You're making it hard for me," Lou said. "I'm offering you three wishes. What will you give me in return?"

"Nothing."

"Wonderful!" Lou exclaimed. "You give me nothing. But if I can turn nothing into everything, then I win."

"Pure sophistry," Ira said.

"No matter. Is it a deal?"

"Sure," Ira said. "Do we shake on it?"

Lou recoiled in horror. "Hell, no—if you'll pardon the expression. If you touched me I'd burn your hand off. I don't need anything as silly as that. Just give me your word, that's all I need."

"Good. You have my word, but—" Ira shook his head. "Wait a minute. Suppose I get my three wishes, and then I die the next day—you're perfectly capable of pulling a trick like that."

"I solemnly promise you at least fifty years of life, after the granting of your three wishes."

"In reasonably good health?" Ira asked.

"Agreed. And on your side there are a couple of conditions. You can't ask to live forever, and you can't try to help someone else. You have to be selfish."

"That's easy."

"Fine. Now there's no hocus-pocus about this. All you do is sit here in your office and state each wish, one week apart and at exactly the same time of the day. It's now one fifty-eight and you can start with the first wish. What is it?"

"Well," Ira said, "you probably know that my marriage to Margot was the biggest mistake I ever made, and that I don't get along with her. She's extravagant, nagging, vindictive—"

"I'm not interested in her character analysis," Lou siad. "Just tell me what you want."

"I want to get rid of her," Ira said.

Lou cracked his fingers. As Ira stared, the figure of Lou seemed gradually to fade away, and Ira found himself staring at the mauve wall opposite his desk. He continued to stare for the next two minutes. Then, as the hour struck two, he heard the doorbell ring and his first afternoon patient came in.

Ira was singularly unstrung all afternoon. It was difficult for him to concentrate, and he was convinced that he'd experienced some kind of debilitating hallucination. He sat with a pad on his lap, as he always did, but instead of making notes he merely doodled. When his patient stopped talking, he remarked absently, "Go ahead. This is all very interesting and I'm listening to every word.

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Just keep on." But later he had no idea of what the patient had said.

At five o'clock, shortly before his last patient was due, he called his home in the suburbs. There was no answer. He called again at six, and again there was no answer.

Coincidence, he decided. Margot was taking a bath or she was working in the garden; but she'd be home as usual when he arrived on the 6:42.

She wasn't. Instead there was a typed note in his study. It read: "Ira, I can't stand it any more. I've found someone I can be happy with and I'm leaving. You can get a divorce on grounds of desertion, and I only hope I'll never see you again."

He thought of calling the police, but why bother? They knew him and they'd probably joke with him and laugh it off. They'd say, "What do you want us to do, Doc? Chase her?"

He stared at the note. It was like her and her sloppy-mindedness to leave the note unsigned, and he decided to rectify the omission, in case he had to produce the note at some future time. It was easy to find a batch of returned checks with her signature, and he practised copying it. When he felt he was reasonably proficient, he wrote it at the bottom of the sheet of paper, put the sheet in a drawer, and went out to a restaurant. He had two martinis and then a small bottle of wine with his steak. He felt drowsy from the liquor and wine, and he went home and to bed. He slept heavily.

The week was uneventful. He told his closer friends that Margot had left him. As the news got around, dinner invitations began to pile up. He was, to a certain extent, a social lion, but he found he was no longer geared to living alone. In particular, the weekend was utterly dreary.

Shortly before two P.M. on the following Tuesday he sat at his desk and watched a familiar shape step through the closed door.

"So you're real," Ira said. "I was beginning to doubt our whole conversation."

"People always start by doubting me," Lou said, "especially these days. With all that scientific nonsense going around, I have to make things seem reasonable. If I promise somebody a fortune, I not only have to produce it, but I have to make it look perfectly natural. For instance, one of my favorite methods is to set up an oil strike in somebody's back yard, although that's not feasible everywhere. I come up against some pretty tough problems."

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"I'm sure you have no real trouble," Ira said. "A man of your talents can do practically anything he wants."

"In a way you're right, but there are difficulties. For instance, for a while I arranged all the lotteries. You didn't know they were rigged, did you?"

"By you?"

Lou nodded. "Naturally, but I've more or less given up the lottery business. If somebody wants a fortune and I promise to let him win a hundred thousand or so, what happens? Taxes! He ends up with less than half his winnings. If people get the idea that I'm a welsher, then where am I? Nobody will sell his soul to a devil who doesn't keep his word. I may be clever and tricky, but I have to project an image of absolute reliability."

"I never thought of it that way."

"Nobody does. To coin a phrase, nobody gives the devil his due." Lou apparently thought he'd uncorked a witticism, and he chuckled. "But did you ever stop to think that I have no prejudices whatsoever? Rich or poor, black or brown or white—I corrupt whoever comes along. If I have any bias at all, it's that I particularly like to corrupt a saint, although nowadays there are damn few of them around. And anyhow, that certainly has nothing to do with you."

Lou glanced at the clock, which showed 1:55. "Those electric gadgets," he said, "they practically run the world, but no clock can run me." He opened his lips and let out a jet of fire straight at the clock, which promptly shattered. "There," he said comfortably. "That's out of the way, so let's call it one fifty-eight, so we can get on with our business. Ready with your second wish?"

"I've been thinking of *nothing* else all week. Lou, I want a meaningful relationship with a lovely woman. I want her to fall in love with me. I can't marry her yet, but I want to live with her as man and wife, in harmony and peace and—"

"Don't get corny. All you really want is a bedmate, and I knew it even before I came here. So—blonde or brunette?"

"Redheaded," Ira said, out of sheer contrariness.

"So be it," Lou said. "See you next week. Same time, same place."

Then the phone rang and Ira answered it, to be told that his two o'clock patient couldn't come today. When he put the phone down, Lucifer had disappeared.

A few minutes later the

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doorbell rang and Ira went out to the waiting room and to the front door. The woman standing there was small, slender, and blue-eyed. She had red hair that curled along the nape of her neck, and she glanced up timorously.

"Dr. Frost?" she said, and she stood there, tongue-tied and unable to conceal her adoration of him.

"I'm Dr. Frost," Ira said. "Come in, won't you?"

"Yes. And I hope you don't mind my coming here without an appointment. If you're too busy—"

"No, no—please. I just happened to get a cancellation."

"How lucky!" she said. "For me."

"For both of us," he said gallantly.

In the next few minutes he learned that her name was Sara Mowberry, that she was 31 years old and divorced, that she'd never really been in love and had never had a satisfying affair.

Once he had her vital statistics and had set up her file, he suggested that she lie down on the couch and tell him about herself. She obeyed self-consciously, as if she suspected he had an ulterior motive, but after she'd settled down, she began talking freely. Her words came in a torrent, as if she wanted Ira, and Ira alone, to know all about her—her problems as a child, the ache of growing up, the marriage she should never have embarked on.

"I want to tell you everything," she said. "Everything." And as she uttered the words she moved provocatively and Ira kept telling himself that fate had brought her here.

Fate? More likely the devil. And he interrupted her.

"Sara, did you ever meet Lou?"

She hesitated. "Lou who?"

"I don't know his last name. Lou something. Did he suggest that you come here?"

"Lou? No. Nobody by that name. It was somebody I met at a party—he spoke highly of you but I can't remember his name. It began with an A. Astor—Astoria—something like that."

"Asmodeus?"

"Maybe, I'm not sure. Why?"

"I do referral work, and I can't remember anybody just walking in, the way you did."

"I didn't just walk in. Somehow I had to. As if—"

"As if you were drawn by an invisible thread?"

Her laughter tinkled as she shook her head.

He got up, walked over to the couch, and sat down next to her. "Sara," he said, "I know a lot of people think that

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psychiatrists take advantage of their patients and make love to them, but I'm not like that. Not at all."

He gazed into her eyes, liquid and somehow drawing him. "I think I'm falling in love," he said.

"I *am* in love," she said.

They had dinner together that evening, and he spent the night in her apartment in the city. He saw her every night for the balance of the week, and on Saturday she came to the country with him.

"I love it here," she said. "I don't want to go back to the city. I want to garden and sit in the sun and breathe fresh air, and wait for you to come home every night. Do you mind?"

"Mind?" he said. "That's like asking a starving man if he'd like something to eat. But the only thing I'm concerned about is you. The neighbors know that my wife left me, and some of them, I'm sure, disapprove of your living here with me."

Her bubbling laugh dismissed the problem as unimportant. "It doesn't matter," she said. "I love you and I don't care if it's legal or not, just so you love me and keep me near you."

"Forever," he said. And she gave him a peculiar look.

In his own mind he had decided what his third wish would be. Lou had promised him fifty years of life after the third wish had been granted, and Ira expected every year and every day of each year to be as perfect as this past week. Even if he believed in this ridiculous fantasy of Lucifer, even if he believed he had a soul and had sold it, the bargain would be well worth it.

Fifty years, Ira thought, and he smiled.

At breakfast on Tuesday morning he gave Sara a fond glance. "Do you realize," he said, "that it's exactly one week since we met?"

"A hundred and sixty-two hours," she said. "Ira, I can hardly believe it!"

"I called off my afternoon appointments," he said. "I thought we'd go somewhere and celebrate."

"Oh, Ira, what a wonderful idea! I'll garden this morning, and then I'll come to the city and meet you at your office. At what time?"

"A little after two," he said. "No earlier. I have a rather unusual patient who stays until two, and he doesn't like to be seen in the office. You know how some people are."

"I understand," she said, and she got up, circled the table, and kissed him gently on the forehead. "Ira!" she murmured.

After lunch later that day he was sitting at his desk when

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Lou appeared. This time he seemed to walk through the wall. In fact, it seemed to Ira that Lou strutted, as if to show off his tricks.

"Doors—walls—windows," Lou remarked. "All the same to me. Except that I don't like heights. Some of the people I have to see live on the fortieth floor or so, and while I'm not actually afraid of falling—I did that once, and from much higher than the fortieth floor—still, I'm never quite comfortable high up."

"Acrophobia," Ira said. "I get it, too, and why not? Because if I fell, it would be all over, whereas you probably wouldn't even get bruised."

"You'd be surprised," Lou said. He glanced at the ruins of the clock. "I meant to ask you—did I short-circuit the building last week?"

"Not that I know of."

"Good. I don't like to create minor inconveniences. I leave that to elves and gnomes and poltergeists. But since we still have a minute or two, tell me how things are going."

"Wonderfully. Sara is perfect, she's almost too good to be believed."

"You can believe in her all right. No doubts there. She's as human as anybody."

"I found that out," Ira remarked. "But Lou, everything that's happened so far can be explained without giving you any credit. Margot left me because she had somebody else. Sara came here because she needed help."

"I told you the other day that I try to stay away from even the appearance of miracles. This is the age of science and technology, and I try to conform to contemporary mores. But now—your last wish."

"I suppose it's obvious," Ira said. "I want money. Plenty of it. I'm not greedy, and I've been thinking of how much I need, and I want one hundred thousand a year. Figuring a five percent return that comes to two million. No more and no less, but remember—tax free."

"Trust me," Lou said, sighing. "But you might give me a little help. Have you ever, for instance, invested in a gold mine and were told that it had petered out? Or bought some bonds of a Latin American country for a few cents each, and then forgotten all about it? Things like that can suddenly be worth a fortune, and your tax is only on a capital-gains basis."

"I have never made any speculative investments," Ira said. "I'm much too conservative."

"I should have realized that,

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but the truth is that I read your dossier several weeks ago, and not too carefully. After all, when you're a few thousand years old, your memory isn't what it used to be."

"It's hard to realize you're a few thousand years old," Ira said. "You certainly don't look it."

"Of course not. I lead a healthy life and go in for none of your food fads. No TV dinners for me, no *haute cuisine.* And in the old days I never attended any of those Roman banquets. Just plain simple food, and only the best."

"You *eat?*"

"Not for nourishment, just for the pleasure. Tell me, did you ever taste a morel mushroom?"

"Morel? What's that?"

"Skip it. I had you mixed up with somebody else. But I'm afraid I have to go now."

"In the usual way?" Ira asked.

Lou nodded and backed toward the wall. "I'll say goodbye for the present," he remarked. "It's been nice knowing you, and I don't mind telling you that our relationship has been exceedingly pleasant. You're so easy to handle."

"Me?" Ira said. But he was speaking to a blank wall.

He kept staring at the wall until the phone rang. He picked it up and said, "Hello?"

Sara spoke up. "Ira, it's me. I'm still home, and I developed the most splitting headache. I get them sometimes. I'm so sorry, I wanted us to have the afternoon together."

"I'm sorry on your account," he said. "Is there anything I can do?"

"No, nothing. I get these migraines occasionally, and I just have to go to bed and wait them out. Please forgive me."

"Feel better," he said. "That's all I want."

After he'd put the phone down, he tapped his fingers on the desk and wondered if he'd made a mistake in not asking Lou for a woman who was never sick. He'd covered himself on his own health without even using an extra wish, but he'd forgotten to include Sara.

Ira straightened up in his chair. Ridiculous. There was no devil and no Lou. Everything that had happened thus far was perfectly natural. Margot had been having an affair—Ira had known that for a long time. Sara had walked into his office just when he, and she, needed each other. It was as simple as that, and nothing was magical and nothing would be, unless money somehow materialized in his pocket.

Which was impossible. He'd

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get his money in a normal way. Or maybe he'd get none, and then he'd be back face to face with normal, prosaic events.

With a long afternoon ahead of him he decided to do some of the work he'd been neglecting during this past week. But first, he went to the door to pick up his afternoon mail.

The long envelope with the return address—Evans, Bromfield & Evans, Attorneys at Law—attracted him immediately and he slit it open. The letter informed him that a former patient of his, a Mrs. Brandon, had died and left the bulk of her estate to him. According to the attorneys the amount was substantial—at least $2,000,000.

Marveling, open-mouthed, Ira reread the letter. He remembered Mrs. Brandon as an eccentric whom he'd treated a couple of years ago. Her cure had been complete.

Lou?

Ira found it hard to contain his excitement. Three wishes, and now he had all that a man could possibly desire: a woman who loved him, plenty of money and no encumbrances, and a guarantee of fifty years of life ahead of him. He felt creative, at the peak of his powers, and a multitude of ideas and projects raced through his mind. He saw for the first time precisely what was wrong with that book of his and what he could do to make it marketable.

Marketable? That was the understatement of the year. He'd have himself a best-seller, he was on the road to fame, he'd be at the top of his profession. And he'd make his recent experiences the basis of articles for the psychiatric journals. His mind raced and he jotted down phrases and notes, and at the end of an hour he had the entire project outlined.

He stood up then. He experienced a freshness of spirit and a mental clarity that were extraordinary. He decided he ought to be with Sara, that something of his buoyant energy might transfer itself to her. Migraines? Maybe he could find out precisely why she got them and effect a cure.

It was midafternoon when he reached his house, unlocked the door, and walked in.

"Sara?" he called.

A man's voice answered him. "She's not here, Doctor."

Ira stared into the dimness of the hallway and saw two men in police uniforms. "What happened?" he asked anxiously. "What's wrong?"

"Would you mind stepping out to the garden with us?" one of the cops said.

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Ira moved forward. His throat was dry and his lips felt parched. "I don't understand. What do you want?"

"If you'll be good enough," the officer said. He took Ira by the arm and edged him outside. There, close to the garden wall, Ira gazed down at the partly excavated body of his wife, Margot.

He shuddered violently. "I had nothing to do with this!" he exclaimed. "I don't know who killed her. She went away and left me a note, it's upstairs, I can show it to you."

"We have it," the cop said drily. "Forged signature and all."

Ira gasped, and from somewhere behind him he seemed to hear the rumbling sound of satanic laughter, and he shivered. Then for the first time he looked at the face of the cop who was arresting him.

It was Lou's.

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"Like a spider in the centre of its web"...

THE MOST DANGEROUS MAN

by R. L. STEVENS

The professor glanced up from the desk where a new treatise on the binomial theorem lay open before him. His ears had detected a noise upon the landing—not loud, but enough to sharpen his senses. When it was repeated, he rose from the chair and walked across the room to the bolted door.

"Who is it?" he asked.

"Dwiggins, Professor! Open the door!"

The bolt was pulled back and the professor turned up the gas-flame a bit higher. "You arrived sooner than I had expected. Did all go well?"

Dwiggins was a slender man with black bushy hair and side-whiskers. His special value was his innate ability to assume the guise of a bumbling tradesman. The professor had known and used him many times in the past, always with success.

"It was perfect, Professor," reported Dwiggins. "I arranged a meeting with Archibald Andrews and told him of my needs. He agreed quite readily when I revealed the sum of money I was willing to pay."

"Capital, Dwiggins!" The professor drew a small note-book from his pocket and made a check mark. Then, with the tip of the pencil running down a list of names, he said, "We will have a final meeting to-morrow evening. Make certain everyone is in attendance."

"Right you are, Professor!"

When he was alone once more, the tall pale man hurried to the window and watched the progress of Dwiggins along the opposite curb. His deeply-sunken eyes scanned the alleyways, searching for a police-agent who might be following the bushy-haired man, but he saw no one. Thus far, nothing had happened to endanger his master plan.

The flickering gas-flames cast an uncertain glow over the five

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men who gathered in the professor's quarters the following evening. They were a mixed lot, drawn from various walks of life, but each had been chosen carefully for his special skills and accomplishments. Seated next to Dwiggins was Coxe, the notorious bank robber, and by his side was Quinn, an expert with a knife who proudly boasted of having been a police suspect in their search for Jack the Ripper only two years earlier. Moran, the former army colonel, was present too, along with Jenkins, a street ruffian especially adept in the handling of horses.

"Now, now," said the professor, peering and blinking at the men before him. "We must get to the business at hand."

"Will it be to-morrow?" asked Coxe.

The professor nodded. "To-morrow, the twenty-third of January, the City and Suburban Bank will make its regular Friday morning delivery of money to its branches. A two-horse van will enter the alleyway off Farringdon Street shortly after nine o'clock to-morrow morning, and proceed to the rear entrance of the bank. The flat of one Archibald Andrews overlooks this alley, and our Mr. Dwiggins has been most successful in luring said Andrews away from his flat for the entire morning. Tell us how it was accomplished, Dwiggins."

The bushy-haired man was quick to oblige. "I approached Andrews yesterday afternoon. Knowing him to be temporarily unemployed, I presented myself as a spice merchant with expectations of setting up a small shop in Oxford Street. I offered to pay him ten pounds if he would spend Friday morning visiting a list of shops and noting the prices charged for a variety of spices. He is to begin at Covent Garden Market promptly at eight, which should keep him far enough from his rooms in Farringdon Street."

"Tut, tut!" said the professor, shaking his head sadly. "I fear that Archibald Andrews will learn more about the price of spices than he really needs to know. Coxe, you should have no trouble with the door to his lodgings. You and Quinn will enter the rooms at precisely half-past eight, and station yourselves at the windows overlooking the alley. When the two-horse van arrives for the money, you will open the windows and prepare to jump. As I explained earlier, there is no manner in which the robbery can be executed while the money is being loaded. The armed guards will be on the alert for trouble. And once it leaves the alley to move through the crowded London streets it will once again be safe from our hands. The one weak link in the chain occurs at the

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precise instant the van is locked and starts out of the alley. The armed guards will have entered a carriage to travel ahead of the van, and the van itself will be travelling so slowly that you two can easily drop onto it from Mr. Andrews's second-storey windows."

"Excuse me, Professor," said Coxe. "I understand all that, but what will the two guards in the carriage do when they realise we have intercepted the van?"

The professor merely smiled, blinking his puckered eyes. "Everything is attended to. Jenkins here will be near at hand, in the guise of a hansom driver. At the proper moment his horse will appear to go out of control, and will carry the hansom cab between the guards' carriage and the van. Quinn will kill the driver of the van, and you will turn it in the opposite direction on Farringdon Street, away from the carriage. If the guards are able to get clear of the hansom and pursue you, Moran will be waiting with his air-gun."

"Where will you be?" asked Quinn.

"Dwiggins and I will be waiting close by. Once you are on your way, we will follow." He turned and took a cut-glass decanter from the sideboard. "Now, gentlemen, I suggest a bit of wine to toast the success of our endeavour on the morrow."

When Archibald Andrews left the doorway of his lodgings just before eight o'clock the following morning, Dwiggins and the professor were watching from across the street. It was a raw, blustery January morning, and the professor had turned up the collar of his greatcoat against the sharpness of the wind.

"Running like clockwork," Dwiggins commented as he watched Andrews go off down the street.

"Good, good!" The professor slipped a watch from his inner pocket and snapped open the lid. "Coxe and Quinn should be starting out now."

They waited, watching the movement of shop-girls and clerks along the busy street. Then, at half-past the hour, the professor saw his two confederates enter the street door to Archibald Andrews's lodgings. Dwiggins returned from his rounds to report. "Coxe and Quinn are in the flat, Professor. I saw them by the windows."

"And Moran?"

"He has just arrived and stationed himself across the street from the alley. The air-gun is hidden in his walking-stick."

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"Jenkins?"

"His hansom is parked near-by."

The professor nodded. All was well.

At six minutes after nine o'clock, the two-horse van appeared and turned into the alley. A carriage drew up behind it and discharged two uniformed guards. The professor's face was oscillating slowly from side to side, in a curiously reptilian fashion, as he watched.

They waited while the minutes ticked by and the professor's sharp eyes scanned the passers-by for any sign of trouble. There seemed nothing unusual until —

"Dwiggins!"

"What is it, Professor?"

"That man hurrying through the crowd across the street—is it Archibald Andrews, returning so soon to his lodgings?"

"Bloody right it is!"

"Come on, we must stop him."

They crossed the street quickly, and Dwiggins called out, "Here now! I hired you to do a job for me!"

Archibald Andrews stopped in his tracks, looking from one to the other. "I—I—"

"Speak up, man!" urged Dwiggins. "This is my partner in the spice shop. Do you have the prices for us?"

"No, sir," muttered Andrews. "That is, you see, it seemed like a great deal of money for you to pay. I mentioned it to a friend of mine last evening—a physician who rooms with a consulting detective of sorts. He suggested something odd might be afoot."

"Quickly," snarled the professor. "If he comes here —"

But already there was movement in the alley. The guards' carriage had moved away, and the two-horse van was starting out with its precious cargo. As the professor watched, he saw Coxe and Quinn throw back the shutters and drop through the windows onto the roof of the van.

In the same instant there came the sound of police whistles, and suddenly the van seemed alive with uniformed bobbies. Coxe and Quinn were seized by a dozen strong arms.

"Quickly!" the professor told Dwiggins. "We must make our escape!"

"What about the others?"

But it was too late for them. Jenkins, abandoning his hansom for flight on foot, was in the clasp of a tall, sharp-featured man

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whose long white fingers seemed to clutch like steel.

"It is too late for them," the professor decided. "We can only hope that Moran was able to make good his escape."

"How did the police discover our plans so quickly?"

"That man is a devil! — that tall one who had Jenkins in his grip! As soon as he discovered that Andrews's lodgings overlooked the alley by the bank, he must have known we were luring the man away for a number of hours while we used his flat to reach the money-van."

"All that because I offered Andrews ten pounds?" Dwiggins followed the professor down a side street, away from the bustle of the crowds. "Who is this man that outwitted us?"

"His name is Sherlock Holmes," answered Professor Moriarty. "He is the most dangerous man in London."

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a NEW Mr. Strang story by

WILLIAM BRITTAIN

In which Mr. Leonard Strang, the gnomelike little science teacher of Aldershot High School, steps out of his field and tackles a historical mystery. But then, is any inquiry ever completely divorced from science? Isn't every investigation a scientific exercise in probing, observing, correlating, analyzing, inferring, deducing, concluding, proving? . . .

MR. STRANG EXAMINES A LEGEND

by WILLIAM BRITTAIN

"The Reverend Abraham VanderBoj was born of a Dutch father and an English mother in London in 1713. It is thought that the strict upbringing he received accounted for the grim and forceful nature of his religious beliefs. Sailing to the colonies in 1738, he traveled throughout New England, preaching of hellfire and damnation. Indeed, his sermons equaled and even surpassed in vehemence those of his contemporary, Jonathan Edwards."

Mr. Strang yawned. He only half listened to the fat lady in the print dress and floppy hat, unctuously delivering her prepared lecture as she pranced among the picnic tables at which the honors history class of Aldershot High School was seated. The students, God bless 'em, were pretending an interest which the old science teacher was sure they didn't feel.

"Isn't she awful, Leonard?" a voice whispered in his ear. He turned to look into the pert face of Nancy Woodhull, the social studies teacher who had planned this Saturday trip for her class.

"I feel like a fool dragging you fifty miles in that rattling old school bus just to listen to her drone on and on," continued Nancy. "I'll bet you had lots better things planned for today."

"But none of them could have been done with such charming company," replied

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Mr. Strang gallantly. "Besides, she's bound to finish sometime. Then maybe we'll be allowed to see the house."

The fat woman delicately patted perspiration from her face with a lace handkerchief. "I am Miss Bunt," she lilted. "I will be your guide. As we walk along the path and through the trees to the house I hope a bit of magic will take place. Try to imagine you are living at a time two centuries ago and that you have come to pay a call on the Reverend VanderBoj. You will see his rooms, his belongings, just as they were when—"

"Excuse me." One of the students raised his hand, peering at the woman through thick glasses. "But are we gonna see the place where VanderBoj committed suicide?"

"Oh, my, you have been doing your homework, haven't you?" Miss Bunt clasped her hands across her ample bosom and smiled archly. "Of course you will. That was in the buttery—one of the last parts of the house we'll see. But before that, you'll be able to examine the last page of his journal. Perhaps then you'll be able to understand the state of mind that drove poor Reverend VanderBoj to suicide."

"They're no fools, anyway," Mr. Strang muttered to Nancy. "Those kids'll sit still for anything just to get a look at the place where an authentic historical corpse once hung."

"Doing himself in was one of the best things VanderBoj ever did, as far as the popularity of the house as a historical site is concerned," said Nancy. "If he hadn't hanged himself, people wouldn't walk across the street to look at this place As it is, history students come from all over the country just to see if they can add a little something to the legend of the VanderBoj suicide."

"Everybody up!" called Miss Bunt, clapping her hands brusquely. "Follow me, please. And I wonder if you two"—she indicated Nancy and Mr. Strang with a stabbing finger—"would mind bringing up the rear "

And with that she was off, like a mother duck followed by a troop of ungainly ducklings

The path led down a slight incline and through a grove of maple trees. Just beyond, in the center of a freshly mowed lawn, stood the VanderBoj house.

The exterior of the two-story house was of rough-hewn planking which had weathered to a uniform gray. The white door was flanked by two windows, each with several small panes, and three similar windows were on the second-floor level.

"You'll note that the win

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dows contain glass," said Miss Bunt. "Quite a rarity in an Eighteenth Century Colonial house. But the people of this community built the house to VanderBoj's specifications, and he insisted on the best."

She walked to the door and opened it with a massive key. "As you enter," she went on, "please note the room to your right. That was the Reverend VanderBoj's study. It was here that he wrote some of his most famous sermons. Over the fireplace are two portraits. One is of Abraham VanderBoj himself, and the other is of his young wife, Barbara."

It took quite some time for the students to file through the doorway and into the room. Finally Nancy and Mr Strang reached it.

"Quite an old buzzard, wasn't he?" said Nancy, nodding toward the portrait on the right. "I'd hate to have to tell him about my sins."

Mr. Strang looked at the painting, his seamed face wrinkling distastefully. For his portrait VanderBoj had stood in the doorway through which they had just entered the house. His flat tricornered hat, surmounting a lean body dressed in unrelieved black except for the silver buckles on his shoes, almost touched the top of the opening. His face was like a chunk of gnarled hickory log to which a beak of a nose had somehow been attached. The mouth turned down in a disapproving frown, and his eyes could have been those of a vengeful and self-righteous patriarch of the Old Testament, glaring their disapproval of a sinning world.

"VanderBoj was fifty-seven when the portrait was painted," Miss Bunt explained. "Barbara's picture was done at the same time. It was the summer before he killed himself."

Barbara VanderBoj's picture was that of a girl in the full bloom of youth. The artist had captured her beauty, but still there was a tenseness about the figure. Perhaps it was in the hands, gripping tightly at the arms of the chair in which she was seated. And the eyes—didn't they have a hint of fear in them?

Clomping along the bare wood floor of the hallway, the gnomelike teacher reached a rack containing several canes and riding whips. Sneaking a guilty glance in the direction of the guide, he lifted out a walking stick. When he placed the tip of the cane on the floor, its knobbed grip extended a full six inches above his belt. Crudely carved into the wood was the inscription: *V.derB. facit.*

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The group stopped before another doorway. "This is the living room, or, as it was called then, the front parlor," explained Miss Bunt. "Note the absence of any of the creature comforts. Heat was provided by the single fireplace, and it was reported that the Reverend VanderBoj took pride in seeing how few logs he could use to get through a winter. The bookcases, now empty, were reputed to hold a Bible and a few other religious texts. As was the case when VanderBoj occupied the house, there are no rugs or curtains."

She motioned to the group to follow. In a long hallway she held up an imperious hand.

"On your right are the stairs leading to the second floor," she said. "Note the door beneath the stairs. This small room was made available to divinity students who sometimes came to receive training in religion and rhetoric from the Reverend VanderBoj. In return they were expected to care for his horses and do other odd jobs about the place."

The room was indeed small. A bed—simply a corn-husk mattress on a rope frame—and a tiny chest of drawers almost completely filled it. On the bed was what looked like a covered frying pan with a wooden handle almost four feet long.

"That warming pan on the bed was most necessary on winter nights," said Miss Bunt. "This room has no fireplace. The pan was filled with hot ashes—probably from the living-room fire—after which the pan was rubbed over the sheets to warm them."

Suddenly Miss Bunt's voice dropped to a conspiratorial hush. "And here," she whispered, "is where we begin to speak about that last fateful night in the fall of 1771—the night the Reverend Abraham VanderBoj hanged himself.

"You will note," she went on, indicating a glass case opposite the foot of the stairs, "that we have here VanderBoj's journal, written in his own hand. The exposed page was written that last night, just minutes before he"—there was a dramatic pause—"he died by his own hand."

As the students filed by the illuminated case Mr. Strang could hear rumblings.

"It was too faded. I could hardly make it out."

"Man, that guy's spelling's worse than mine."

"How come all the s's look like f's?"

When it came his turn to view the journal, Mr. Strang had to agree with the students. The final entry, written in a spidery hand, might have been impres-

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sive. It was also illegible.

"Anyone not practiced in reading such script," said Miss Bunt with a simper, "is sure to have difficulty with it. Therefore, I will—uh—translate. As I do so, picture Abraham Vander-Boj walking through this house, a portable desk in his hand, writing these last words in his journal."

Her voice dropped, trying to approximate a masculine register. "'It nears midnight, and the catarrh from which I have suffered these last several days continues to worsen. It invades my brain, enfeebling my soul and making my thoughts mean and destructive.

"'The very air this night seems charged with evil. Without, a high wind shakes the house to its foundation, seeking entrance through any opening, be it ever so small. And what is this? My wife, in manner quite unlike her usual wont, has left her chamber door unbolted.

"'The devil will mock me no longer. I will pursue him to his hell below and there do battle. O woe! O misery! Alas for me!'"

In the gloom of the old house Mr. Strang had to admit it was a striking performance. Besides him he could feel Nancy Woodhull trembling. Miss Bunt's outstretched hand pointed up the stairs.

"As you go up," she said, "you will see Abraham Vander-Boj's portable writing desk still lying in the hallway. Please step carefully around it. It is lying in the same spot where he dropped it on his way to the buttery to put an end to his own life."

Mr. Strang sensed the change that had come over Nancy Woodhull's students. No longer was Miss Bunt a silly old woman in an absurd print dress. Instead she was their guide to a mysterious event that had occurred 200 years before when a man recorded on paper the very moment his mind slipped beyond the bounds of reason, and his death was the result.

Respectfully they tiptoed around the small writing desk, not much more than a shallow box with a hinged lid. In a socket at one corner was a tiny glass inkwell.

"This first door to the left," said Miss Bunt, "is to Abraham's bedroom. Kept awake by his illness, he must have slipped outside into the hallway here, carrying the writing desk with him. From this point he made his way along the hall to the next room on the left, that of his wife Barbara." She moved to the next doorway.

"Abraham tried Barbara's door and found that it was open. Perhaps frightened by the

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wind, she had forgotten to lock it. And then, for some unknown reason, his mind snapped. He considered himself an avenging angel, fit to do battle with the devil. Flinging the writing desk from him, he plunged down the stairs. From there he went into the buttery—next stop on the tour."

Peering into the bedroom of the late Mrs. VanderBoj, Mr. Strang felt a little like a Peeping Tom. There was the bed, its homespun coverlet lumpy over the rude mattress. Beside the bed was a small table on which stood a bowl and pitcher. On the wall was a rude drawing of Moses carrying the ten commandments. To the teacher's left, an interconnecting door, hung on hand-forged hinges, stood half open, revealing a similar bed and table in Abraham VanderBoj's room.

"Lead on, Miss Bunt," said the little teacher finally. "Where's that buttery you were talking about?"

In the large kitchen the students were allowed to examine the cavelike fireplace with its hooks and spits, pots and kettles, where, Miss Bunt assured them, Barbara VanderBoj prepared all the meals, her husband being much too frugal to employ a servant. Finally the class was herded into the buttery.

"It's what we'd call a pantry nowadays," said Miss Bunt. "Note the trough over there lined with metal. Water from a spring was pumped into that trough, providing a crude method of keeping foods cool in the summer."

"Where'd VanderBoj hang himself?" asked one of the students without preamble.

"Ah, yes, I did promise to show you that, didn't I?" Miss Bunt gave a girlish titter. "Look up. You'll see the beams overhead. In the main part of the house they're covered with a plaster made of shells, but here such decoration was thought to be a luxury and therefore unnecessary."

Mr. Strang reached up and slapped a hand along the side of the oak beam under which he was standing. There was the dull thunk of flesh against wood.

"Oh, they're strong enough," said Miss Bunt. "Whole sides of beef used to hang from those beams."

"And which one did VanderBoj—" the teacher began.

"The very one you have your hand on," said Miss Bunt with a smile. "Barbara found her husband hanging there when she got up the following morning. His neck was broken, and a stool was lying on its side near his dangling feet Villagers

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were called in to cut him down and prepare him for burial. And there is one interesting sidelight."

"What's that?" asked Nancy.

"Because of the suicide, it was impossible to find a clergyman willing to offer prayers for VanderBoj. Finally Barbara herself had to say the prayers over her dead husband. A few days later she abandoned the house forever."

Opening the door at the rear of the buttery, Miss Bunt stepped out into the sunlight and gave a slight curtsy. "And that concludes our tour of the VanderBoj house," she said with a smile. "If you'll just follow the path to the top of the hill you'll find our pavilion. Refreshments are available there, as well as souvenirs of your visit. Our offices are also located there, so if you have any questions you'd care to ask, Mr. Kimbrough is the man to see. He's considered quite an authority not only on the house itself but on the events surrounding Abraham VanderBoj's suicide."

Nancy Woodhull and Mr. Strang walked along the path behind the flock of students, many of whom were making choking noises and holding their necks in odd positions, while others giggled. "Charming place I brought you to," said Nancy ironically. "I'm really sorry, Leonard. But Mr. Guthrey insisted I needed another chaperon." A long pause. "Leonard Strang, are you listening to me?"

"Huh?" Startled from his reverie, Mr. Strang blinked his eyes and grinned ruefully. "Sorry, Nancy," he said. "It's just that—oh, I guess history isn't really my field."

"It wasn't very interesting, was it? I mean, except for the suicide it would be just another old house."

"Interesting? Nancy, I was fascinated." They reached the pavilion and found an empty table. Mr. Strang held a chair for Nancy and then took another for himself. After carefully polishing his black-rimmed glasses on his necktie he stoked up his pipe and puffed away, staring at the ceiling. "I just seem to be drawing all the wrong conclusions," he mused.

"What are you talking about, Leonard?" asked Nancy.

"We both heard the same things down there at the house—Miss Bunt's talk and that page from the journal. Well, to me it just doesn't add up to suicide."

"Excuse me." Nancy and Mr. Strang looked up to see a rather portly man standing at their table. "Kimbrough's my

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name," he said with a smile. "Harold Kimbrough. Thought I'd see how your class liked the house and I couldn't help overhearing your conversation. Now, I'll admit the ladies who act as guides sometimes emphasize the local color a bit too much, but generally they've got their facts straight. What's troubling you, Mr.—uh—"

"Strang," said the teacher, extending his hand. "Leonard Strang. And I wonder if you'd mind telling me how you came to the conclusion that the Reverend Abraham VanderBoj committed suicide."

"Well, the hanging's pretty well authenticated—diaries of other people, medical reports, and all that. Besides, there's that last entry in old VanderBoj's journal. 'The devil will mock me no longer. I will pursue him to his hell below and there do battle.' It's perfectly obvious VanderBoj had suddenly lost his marbles. And to a man in his condition, what better way to seek out the devil than by committing suicide?"

"And you figured all that out from the journal?"

"Yes, but—"

"Have you got a copy? A legible one, I mean?"

Kimbrough walked to the souvenir stand and spoke to the girl behind the counter. He returned carrying a picture postcard and handed it to Mr. Strang. "On the left is a photo of the actual journal. The printed version is on the right."

There were a few moments of silence after Mr. Strang read the words. "Now let me get this straight," he said finally. "On the basis of this journal you've concluded that on the night of his death Abraham VanderBoj was wandering through the upper hallway of his house, writing in his journal. He tried the hall door which led into his wife's room and found it unlocked. Then, for some unknown reason he took leave of his senses, rushed into the buttery, and hanged himself. Is that about right?"

"Well, yes," replied Kimbrough. "But remember, the journal isn't all we have to go on. There are eyewitness accounts from people who saw the body even before it was cut down. And the position of the writing desk has also been authenticated. The local surgeon himself examined the body at that time and pronounced it a suicide."

"Oh, hemichordata!" exclaimed the little teacher. "Do you mean to tell me that for two hundred years historians have been taking the word of some part-time doctor who probably earned the better part

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of his living by cutting hair? Why, the whole thing is as plain as the nose on old Abraham's face."

"What's plain, Mr. Strang?" asked Nancy.

"The Reverend Abraham VanderBoj didn't kill himself. He was murdered in cold blood."

The reference to murder brought the students flocking to the table where the slender teacher was seated. Across from him Kimbrough smiled indulgently.

"Come now, Mr. Strang," chuckled Kimbrough. "I hardly think a murder could have remained undiscovered for two centuries. After all, the death of VanderBoj has been the subject of some pretty intensive study. I did my master's thesis on it myself."

"Would you care to listen to my theory?" asked the teacher, his eyes twinkling. "Maybe I can give you a subject for a doctoral dissertation."

"The floor is yours," replied Kimbrough. "But I warn you, it'll be tough to convince me."

The teacher rose, stalked to the head of the table, and turned to face his audience. Whipping his black-rimmed glasses from his nose, he placed them in a jacket pocket.

"First," he began, "I ask you to consider the portrait of the Reverend VanderBoj—the hard set of his mouth, the determination in those eyes. VanderBoj was clearly the captain of his fate. As soon as I saw that portrait I knew that such a man might be hard or even cruel. But he would never commit suicide. Self-destruction is the refuge of weaklings. And VanderBoj, whatever he was, was no weakling."

"Hardly proof, Mr. Strang," said Kimbrough. "You'll have to do better than that."

"All right, let's take another aspect of the portrait. In it, VanderBoj's head almost touches the top of the doorway. Therefore, he must have been an exceptionally tall man. The impression that he was taller than the average was confirmed when I examined a cane with his initials on it. Only a very tall man could have used it comfortably."

Kimbrough nodded. "Score one for your side," he said. "VanderBoj was almost six and a half feet tall. But I still don't see what this has to do with murder."

"Consider for a moment that beam in the buttery," replied Mr. Strang. "I'm rather short myself. And yet I was able to reach up and place the flat of my hand against the side of that beam. A person as tall as VanderBoj would have at most

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only a couple of inches of clearance between the beam and the top of his head."

"So?"

"Mr. Kimbrough, when a man is properly hanged, he falls a distance of at least a foot—perhaps more, depending on his weight. In any case it's far enough so that the knotted rope, slamming against the victim's head as it jerks tight, breaks his neck. But now consider VanderBoj, dangling from the beam with his feet off the ground. His head must have been actually touching the beam. He couldn't have fallen any distance at all. Oh, he might have died of strangulation, of course. But under the circumstances he couldn't possibly have broken his neck during the hanging."

"But the neck was broken," said Kimbrough. "All the accounts agree on that point. How do you suggest it happened, Mr. Strang?"

"I'll get to that. But first, another inconsistency in the legend. Previous to the hanging, VanderBoj was supposed to have been wandering through the house in the middle of the night. In one hand was the writing desk. In the other, presumably, a quill pen. So I ask you this, Mr. Kimbrough, how did he hold the candle?"

"Candle? What candle?"

"He had to see to write, didn't he? Therefore he needed a candle or a lantern or something. And it couldn't have remained in a fixed position since VanderBoj was pacing along the hallway. So where was the candle? Did he hold it clenched between his teeth? No, Mr. Kimbrough, it just won't wash. There was no candle because VanderBoj wasn't in the hallway when he wrote that final entry in his journal."

"But the journal says—"

"The journal is the one thing about this whole affair that makes sense. It is not, as you seem to think, the ravings of a madman."

"Mr. Strang?" A lanky boy dressed in blue jeans and a tie-dyed T-shirt raised his hand.

"Yes, Cal. What is it?"

"Well, sir, you've been telling us all the things that are *wrong* with the story we heard down at the house. But that's really not good enough, is it? I mean, maybe the story's full of holes, but it's what we're stuck with. That is, unless you can tell us what really *did* happen to VanderBoj."

"The boy has a point, Mr. Strang," added Kimbrough. "Oh, I'll admit you've given me some things to think about. But the original story will have to stand—with some minor altera-

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tions—unless you can prove this murder theory of yours. It's easy enough to be negative, to tear down the legend. But you have yet to prove a murder."

Mr. Strang took a deep breath and then let it out slowly. "Very well," he said. "Let's consider the house, not as it stands today, but as it existed two centuries ago. The straight-laced master is the Reverend Abraham VanderBoj. He is tall, forbidding in appearance, and, I have no doubt, given to frequent sermonizing on the horrors that await those who commit the slightest sin either in deed or thought."

"As your students would say, 'Right on,'" interrupted Kimbrough. "You've described the old boy just as if you'd met him personally."

"VanderBoj has only been married a short time," continued the teacher. "His wife is a pretty young thing only a year or so older than the girls in the class here. The union was probably arranged by Barbara's parents, overjoyed that such an eminent person should be attracted to their daughter. But what would have been the reaction of the girl herself at being forced to marry such a man?"

"I'd be scared to death of him," said a girl seated on the floor. "What a disgusting person to have as a husband."

"Disgust. That's the very word," continued Mr. Strang. "Consider the plight of that poor creature, condemned to live out her life as the wife of that man. Is it any wonder she bolted the door of her room each night?"

"What's that?" asked Kimbrough.

"The journal says so," replied the teacher, referring to the postcard. "'My wife, in manner quite unlike her usual wont, has left her chamber door unbolted.' Therefore she usually kept it locked.

"And now," he went on, "I ask you to think again about the impossibility of VanderBoj's breaking his neck by hanging himself from the rafter."

"Is that your idea?" said Kimbrough. "That VanderBoj's body was hung up there after his neck was broken?"

"Exactly!" snapped the teacher.

"Really, Mr. Strang." Nancy Woodhull's voice was filled with skepticism. "I find it awfully hard to believe that a tiny thing like Barbara VanderBoj could have carried that big man anywhere, to say nothing of hauling him up to the rafter at the end of a rope."

"It would have been absolute-

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ly out of the question. And that's why we have to postulate the presence of a third person in the VanderBoj house that fateful evening."

"Impossible," objected Kimbrough. "VanderBoj had no servant."

"Do you really find it so surprising?" asked the teacher. "What about that little room under the stairs? VanderBoj was in the habit of giving lodging to divinity students. And a reasonably muscular young man would have no trouble in moving VanderBoj's body and hanging it from the beam."

"I'll bet he had blue eyes," tittered one girl.

"Hope he had wavy blond hair, too," giggled another.

"I suspect," snorted Mr. Strang, "that he could have been as homely as a mud fence and Barbara would still have been attracted to him. Anything would have looked good to her after living with VanderBoj for a few months."

"Okay, okay," said Kimbrough. "VanderBoj couldn't have broken his neck by hanging from the beam. Therefore he had to have been moved there. And Barbara couldn't have moved him herself. So I guess the idea of the young divinity student is a reasonable speculation. Go ahead, Mr. Strang."

"Now, let's get to the night in question," said the teacher. "Because finally I think we're ready to put that last entry from VanderBoj's journal into its proper context. He first mentions suffering from 'the catarrh'—most likely a head cold—and feeling miserable. So he did just what you or I would do under the same circumstances."

"Like going down to the buttery and hanging himself?" suggested Kimbrough drily.

"No, he simply went to bed. The hours passed. VanderBoj tossed and turned, but his head cold prevented him from falling asleep. Therefore he lit the candle on the table beside his bed, planning to write in his journal. He sat up in bed, his writing desk across his knees."

"This is all pure conjecture on your part, of course," said Kimbrough.

"True," Mr. Strang replied. "But it's certainly a lot more convincing than that business about carrying the desk through the outer hall with a candle between his teeth. Besides, see how it fits what was written in the journal.

"VanderBoj first complains about his cold. Then he mentions the wind and the drafty old house. He looks up, clearly surprised. And what does he say next? 'My wife, in

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manner quite unlike her usual wont, has left her chamber door unbolted.'"

"But it would have been impossible from his bed for VanderBoj to see the hall door to his wife's room," protested Kimbrough. "I mean, unless he first opened the—the—" His voice trailed off uncertainly. "That's got to be it," he finally murmured. "VanderBoj wasn't referring to his wife's hallway door at all."

"You're beginning to see it," smiled the teacher. "The door he spoke of was the connecting door between the two bedrooms, his wife's and his—the door that VanderBoj realized hadn't been bolted because a draft was blowing it slowly open."

"And what did VanderBoj see in his wife's bedroom?" asked Nancy Woodhull, her eyes wide with excitement.

"It's what he didn't see that's important," answered Mr. Strang. "Because in spite of the fact that it was midnight, Barbara hadn't come to bed. The room was empty!

"Not being a complete fool, VanderBoj must have realized immediately that his wife, whom he may have suspected of being attracted to the young divinity student, was downstairs with the young man at that very moment Thus the final entry in the journal: 'The devil will mock me no longer. I will pursue him to his hell below and there do battle.' The 'devil,' of course, was the student, and the 'hell below' was the room under the stairs. So you see, those words aren't the ravings of a lunatic but simply VanderBoj's statement of what he planned to do.

"Scrawling the final phrases in the journal, he left his bedroom, angrily flinging the writing desk into the hallway Once he'd reached the main floor downstairs, he undoubtedly threw open the door of the student's room and—well, I doubt the two were just sitting and talking. After all, the bed occupies most of the space in that tiny room."

"That's it," repeated Kimbrough dazedly "That must be it. There'll be a lot of red faces at the next meeting of the historical society "

"But how did Abraham VanderBoj get his neck broken?" asked one of the students.

"I doubt we'll ever know all the details," said Mr Strang. "I'd suspect, however, that either Barbara or the student clobbered him at the base of the skull with that warming pan Afterward, of course, they carried his body to the buttery, strung it up on the beam, and

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tipped over a stool to give the appearance of suicide and to divert suspicion from themselves. The student left, to be followed by Barbara shortly after the funeral. The townspeople who later viewed the body were too much in awe of the Reverend VanderBoj to question the suicide story. Thus the wording of the journal has been misinterpreted for two hundred years."

The last remark was interrupted by the honking of a horn from outside.

"That's the bus, Mr. Strang," said Nancy. "We ought to be leaving now."

Whipping out his black-rimmed glasses, the teacher placed them on the bridge of his nose. As he was about to follow the students from the pavilion, Kimbrough plucked at his sleeve.

"Mr. Strang, you've just made about a thousand dollars' worth of guide books and pamphlets completely worthless," he said. "But still, I appreciate what you've done for the VanderBoj house. Come back and see us again—on a Sunday, if possible."

"Sunday? Why Sunday?"

"Because that's the only day we're closed. And once your story gets out, this place'll be mobbed any time the public can get in. There's nothing like a nice brutal murder to promote a healthy interest in history."

"O"

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Again Celia Fremlin with her special "touch," her special magic. . .

"To plant a new lilac, you say? But you didn't need to've cleared the whole bloomin' bed, a whole six foot of it, just to plant a lilac bush!"

WAITING FOR THE POLICE

by CELIA FREMLIN

The topsoil had been easy. He remembered how lightly the spade had tossed the loose earth this way and that in the moonlight. For those first minutes it had all been as effortless as in a dream—the strange euphoria of the previous evening was still flowing strongly in his veins, giving his thin young arms the strength, almost, of a grown man.

But two feet down he came to the clay—the sullen, sodden, implacable London clay; and it was only then that the dreamlike omnipotence began to drain out of him. Now the sweat of terror began to glisten on his forehead and his skinny adolescent arms began to quiver with exhaustion.

The length was all right. The uprooted dahlias and the shaggy, seeding willow-herb lay blanched in the moonlight along half the length of the devastated autumn flowerbed. But only two feet deep! It would have to be deeper than that, much deeper. Four feet? Six? Years of wide but desultory reading of lurid paperbacked stories had not provided him with this sort of solid, factual information; but any fool could see that a depth of two feet would not be enough.

He was crying now, in a sort of weak fury at the obstinate, devilish clay. He would have stamped and stormed at it, throwing a tantrum like a toddler, if it had not been for all those silent, curtained windows overlooking, like lightly closed eyes, the whole row of

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little back gardens. Any moment now one of those sleeping eyes might open, with a streak of yellow light between the curtains, and a sly sleepy voice would call out, "What's going on there?" or maybe, more raucously, "Shut that bleedin' row!"

This soft squelch of spade on clay—*was* it a bleedin' row? Of course it was—it seemed to him that it must be heard for miles! And then there would be more voices, more cracks of light, eyes everywhere, queries called across the cloying darkness. Would it be best, when all this began happening, to make a clean breast of it? To tell them straightaway, in a ringing shout, before they came flitting out of the doors and alleyways, over the fences, like ghosts attracted by the smell of blood, to find out what was going on?

"I have killed my love," he would yell to them across the gardens, across the closed, listening night swept silent by the moon. "I have killed my love, my only love. She was with Cyril—Cyril from the Gas Board offices, with his posh voice and natty suit. She was standing by the front door, I could see her face in the moonlight, and when she saw me coming she laughed. She pointed, and she whispered to Cyril, and then he laughed, too

"That was their last laugh, though, the last laugh they'll ever have. He ran away like I've never seen a man run, nor even a rat; and her, she's lying there in the passage where I dragged her. I hope—yes, the thing I hope most of all—is that she was still alive just long enough to see him run like that, see him run away like a rat, and never lifted a finger to protect her! That's what I hope—she was alive just long enough to see—to see it, and to know it, before she died."

The clay, the damnable accursed clay! Tears of fury and terror streaked the boy's thin moon-blanched face; his breath came in feeble sobs, like the sobs of the wet clay under the onslaughts of his jabbing spade.

But he did not give up. He couldn't give up, for soon it would be dawn, and then bright morning, and the cover of darkness would be gone. So he struggled on, and gradually, inch by inch, as if dragging at the very intestines of the earth, he got the clay to move; and presently, into his trance of exhaustion, there came, dully, the knowledge that the hole was deep enough at last As deep as it would ever be Deep enough anyway, for his love, his sweet treacherous love

Oh but the dangers still ahead! With morning, the

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neighbors would come. "Getting busy in the garden, eh? Them dahlias—you didn't oughter 'a' pulled up them dahlias, not while they're still flowering. What a shame! Just look at them, all them colors!"

"To plant a new lilac, you say? But you didn't need to've cleared the whole bloomin' bed, a whole six foot of it, just to plant a lilac bush! Besides, what does a young lad like you want with a lilac? It's only a rented room you got in there, innit? You'll be gone off, lad, somewheres else, that's for sure, long before that lilac can bloom!"

But as the days went by, the questioning died down. Gradually the horticultural experts of the little street lost interest in the boy's folly, and turned their attention back to their own gardens; and at last the boy himself began to sleep again at night, instead of lying tense as whipcord through the black hours, waiting for the police to come for him.

And so the autumn passed, and a long sodden December, and while it was still winter, before even the crocuses had begun to show their first leaves, tiny green things had already begun to sprout in the flat untidy soil above his own true love. Weeds, presumably, but he never found out for certain; nor did he ever know whether the lilac bloomed, for, just as the neighbors had predicted, before this could possibly have happened, he was gone.

"Now, come along, Mr. Parsons! Drink up! Just look at Mrs. Carruthers, she's on her second cup already, you're getting left all behind. Come on, Mr. Parsons, wakey, wakey! What's the good of bringing you out into the garden for your tea when you just—oh, dear! Shall I hold the saucer for you? There, is that better? Can you manage now?"

The young woman's voice went on and on, bright and bracing, but he had been at the Old People's Home a long time now, and he no longer listened. Nor was he bothered any longer by the sweet tepid tea which his throat was obediently gulping from the expertly tipped cup.

He was aware only of the lilac in full bloom, above and all around him, and the sweet May breeze stirring the mauve blossoms, heavy with bees. Now that he was more than 90 years old, he was finding it hard to distinguish the sweet summer days, one from another, over the long years.

He was a little confused, too, about the lilacs—so many of them there had been, in gardens here and gardens there, bloom-

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ing and fading, through 90 springtimes. By now they were all the same lilac, and beneath it lay his love, his first and only love, with her bright hair and her green enchanting eyes.

Over the long years he had waited for the police; but they had never caught him, never even suspected anything. He recalled how, over the years, the guilt and terror had gradually faded, to be buried at last, forever, under the turmoil of the rushing adult years. Marriage—children—work; success and failure; and more work; they had come and gone, and now at last he was close to her again, close to his first love, as lovely still as on the day he had killed her.

Killed her. How thankful he was now that he had done it! That he had killed her then, on that moonlit autumn night, in the full flower of her loveliness, more than 70 years ago! A murderer in shining armor, he had saved her from this Old People's Home as surely as St. George had saved his princess from the dragon.

They would never get her now! Not for her the shameful, slobbering gulps of tea from a cup that her trembling hands could no longer manage; not for her the wheel chair, or the bright, professional voices impatiently jollying her through the dim dead days.

Not for her the crutches, the pointless tottering round and round the smooth, terrible lawns. Not for her the ill-fitting teeth, the mislaid spectacles, the endless, feeble bickering of the old, as thin as the mewing of seagulls left stranded by a tide that has gone out too far ever to turn again.

"Thank God I murdered you, my darling," he murmured into the lilac-scented air; and the nurse, noticing that old Mr. Parsons was mumbling to himself again, and slobbering over his cup, decided it was time to wheel him indoors.

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CARROT FOR A CHESTNUT

by DICK FRANCIS

Chick stood and sweated with the carrot in his hand. His head seemed to be floating and he couldn't feel his feet on the ground, and the pulse thudded massively in his ear. A clammy green pain shivered in his gut.

Treachery was making him sick.

The time: 50 minutes before sunrise. The morning: cold. The raw swirling wind was clearing its throat for a fiercer blow, and a heavy layer of nimbostratus was fighting every inch of the way against the hint of light. In the neat box stalls round the stable yard the dozing horses struck a random hoof against a wooden wall, rattled a tethering chain, sneezed the hay dust out of a moist black nostril.

Chick was late. Two hours

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late. He'd been told to give the carrot to the lanky chestnut at four o'clock in the morning, but at four o'clock in the morning it had been pouring with rain—hard, slanting rain that soaked a man to the skin in one minute flat, and Chick had reckoned it would be too difficult explaining away a soaking at four o'clock in the morning. Chick had reckoned it would be better to wait until the rain stopped, it couldn't make any difference. Four o'clock, six o'clock, what the hell. Chick always knew better than anyone else.

Chick was a thin, disgruntled 19-year-old who always felt the world owed him more than he got. He had been a bad-tempered, argumentative child and an aggressively rebellious adolescent. The resulting snarling habit of mind was precisely what was now hindering his success as an adult. Not that Chick would have agreed, of course. Chick never agreed with anyone if he could help it. Always knew better, did Chick.

He was unprepared for the severity of the physical symptoms of fear. His usual attitude toward any form of authority was scorn (and authority had not so far actually belted him one across his sulky mouth). Horses had never scared him because he had been born to the saddle and had grown up mastering everything on four legs with contemptuous ease. He believed in his heart that no one could really ride better than he could. He was wrong.

He looked apprehensively over his shoulder, and the shifting pain in his stomach sharply intensified. That simply couldn't happen, he thought wildly. He'd heard about people getting sick with fear. He hadn't believed it. It couldn't happen. Now, all of a sudden, he feared it could. He tightened all his muscles desperately, and the spasm slowly passed. It left fresh sweat standing out all over his skin and no saliva in his mouth.

The house was dark. Upstairs, behind the black open window with the pale curtain flapping in the spartan air, slept Arthur Morrison, trainer of the 43 race horses in the stables below. Morrison habitually slept lightly. His ears were sharper than half a dozen guard dogs', his stable hands said.

Chick forced himself to turn his head away, to walk in view of that window, to take ten exposed steps down to the chestnut's stall.

If the guvnor woke up and saw him. . .Gawd, he thought furiously, he hadn't expected it to be like this. Just a lousy walk down the yard to give a carrot

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to the gangly chestnut. Guilt and fear and treachery. They bypassed his sneering mind and erupted through his nerves.

He couldn't see anything wrong with the carrot. It hadn't been cut in half and hollowed out and packed with drugs and tied together again. He'd tried pulling the thick end out like a plug, and that hadn't worked either. The carrot just looked like any old carrot, any old carrot you'd watch your ma chop up to put in a stew. Any old carrot you'd give to any old horse. Not a very young, succulent carrot or a very aged carrot, knotted and woody. Just any old ordinary *carrot.*

But strangers didn't proposition you to give any old carrot to one special horse in the middle of the night. They didn't give you more than you earned in half a year when you said you'd do it. Any old carrot didn't come wrapped carefully alone in a polythene bag inside an empty cheese-cracker packet, given to you by a stranger in a car park after dark in a town six miles from the stables. You didn't give any old carrot in the middle of the night to a chestnut who was due to start favorite in a high-class steeplechase eleven hours later.

Chick was getting dizzy with holding his breath by the time he'd completed the ten tiptoed steps to the chestnut's stall. Trying not to cough, not to groan, not to let out the strangling tension in a sob, he curled his sweating fingers around the bolt and began the job of easing it, inch by frightening inch, from its socket.

By day he slammed the bolts open and shut with a smart practised flick. His body shook in the darkness with the strain of moving by fractions.

The bolt came free with the tiniest of grating noises, and the top half of the split door swung slowly outward. No squeaks from the hinges, only the whisper of metal on metal. Chick drew in a long breath like a painful, trickling, smothered gasp and let it out between his clenched teeth. His stomach lurched again, threateningly. He took another quick, appalled grip on himself and thrust his arm in a panic through the dark, open space.

Inside the stall the chestnut was asleep, dozing on his feet. The changing swirl of air from the opening door moved the sensitive hairs around his muzzle and raised his mental state from semiconsciousness to inquisitiveness. He could smell the carrot. He could also smell the man: smell the fear in the man's sweat.

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"Come on," Chick whispered desperately. "Come on, then, boy."

The horse moved his nose around toward the carrot and finally, reluctantly, his feet. He took it indifferently from the man's trembling palm, whiffing it in with his black mobile lips, scrunching it languidly with large rotations of jaw. When he had swallowed all the pulped-up bits he poked his muzzle forward for more. But there was no more, just the lighter square of sky darkening again as the door swung shut, just the faint sounds of the bolt going back, just the fading smell of the man and the passing taste of carrot.

Presently he forgot about it and turned slowly round again so that his hindquarters were toward the door, because he usually stood that way, and after a minute or two he blinked slowly, rested his near hind leg lazily on the point of the hoof and lapsed back into twilight mindlessness.

Down in his stomach the liquid narcotic compound with which the carrot had been injected to saturation gradually filtered out of the digesting carrot cells and began to be absorbed into the bloodstream. The process was slow and progressive. And it had started two hours late.

Arthur Morrison stood in his stable yard watching his men load the chestnut into the motor horse-box that was to take him to the races. He was eyeing the proceedings with an expression that was critical from habit and bore little relation to the satisfaction in his mind. The chestnut was the best horse in his stable: a frequent winner, popular with the public, a source of prestige as well as revenue.

The big steeplechase at Cheltenham had been tailor-made for him from the day its conditions had been published, and Morrison was adept at producing a horse in peak condition for a particular race. No one seriously considered that the chestnut would be beaten. The newspapers had tipped it to a man, and the bookmakers were fighting shy at 6 to 4 on. Morrison allowed himself a glimmer of warmth in the eyes and a twitch of smile to the lips as the men clipped shut the heavy doors of the horse van and drove it out of the yard.

These physical signs were unusual. The face Morrison normally wore was a compound of concentration and disapproval in roughly equal proportions. Both qualities contributed considerably to his success as a race-horse trainer

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and to his unpopularity as a person, a fact he was well aware of. He didn't in the least care that almost no one liked him. He valued success and respect much more highly than love and held in incredulous contempt all those who did not.

Across the yard Chick was watching the horse van drive away, his usual scowl in place. Morrison frowned irritably. The boy was a pest, he thought. Always grousing, always impertinent, always trying to scrounge up more money. Morrison didn't believe in boys having life made too easy: a little hardship was good for the soul. Where Morrison and Chick radically differed was the point at which each thought hardship began.

Chick spotted the frown and watched Morrison fearfully, his guilt pressing on him like a rock. He couldn't know, he thought frantically. He couldn't even suspect there was anything wrong with the horse or he wouldn't have let him go off to the races. The horse had looked all right, too. Absolutely his normal self. Perhaps there had been nothing wrong with the carrot. . .Perhaps it had been the wrong carrot, even. . .Chick glanced around uneasily and knew very well he was fooling himself. The horse might look all right but he wasn't.

Arthur Morrison saddled up his horse at the races, and Chick watched him from ten nervous paces away, trying to hide in the eager crowd that pushed forward for a close view of the favorite. There was a larger admiring crowd outside the chestnut's saddling stall than for any of the other seven runners, and the bookmakers had shortened their odds.

Behind Morrison's concentrated expression an itch of worry was growing insistent. He pulled the girth tight and adjusted the buckles automatically, acknowledging to himself that his former satisfaction had changed to anxiety. The horse was not himself. There were no lively stamping feet, no playful nips from the teeth, no response to the crowd; this was a horse that usually played to the public like a film star. He couldn't be feeling well, and if he wasn't feeling well he wouldn't win.

Morrison tightened his mouth. If the horse were not well enough to win, he would prefer him not to run at all. To be beaten at odds-on would be a disgrace. A defeat on too large a scale. A loss of face. Particularly as Morrison's own eldest son Toddy was to be the jockey.

Morrison came to a decision and sent for the vet.

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The rules of jump racing in England stated quite clearly that if a horse had been declared a runner in a race, only the say-so of a veterinarian was sufficient grounds for withdrawing him during the last three-quarters of an hour before post time. The Cheltenham racecourse veterinarian came and looked at the chestnut and, after consulting with Morrison, led it off to a more private stall and took its temperature.

"His temperature's normal," the veterinarian assured Morrison.

"I don't like the look of him."

"I can't find anything wrong."

"He's not well," Morrison insisted.

The veterinarian pursed his lips and shook his head. There was nothing obviously wrong with the horse, and he knew he would be in trouble himself if he allowed Morrison to withdraw so hot a favorite on such slender grounds. Not only that, this was the third application for withdrawal he'd had to consider that afternoon. He had refused both the others, and the chestnut was certainly in no worse a state.

"He'll have to run," the veterinarian said positively, making up his mind.

Morrison was furious and went raging off to find a steward, who came and looked at the chestnut and listened to the vet and confirmed that the horse would have to run whether Morrison liked it or not. Unless, that was, Morrison cared to involve the horse's absent owner in paying a heavy fine?

With a face of granite Morrison resaddled the chestnut, and a stable lad led him out into the parade ring, where most of the waiting public cheered and a few wiser ones looked closely and hurried off to hedge their bets.

With a shiver of dismay Chick saw the horse reappear and for the first time regretted what he'd done. That stupid vet, he thought violently. He can't see what's under his bloody nose, he couldn't see a barn at ten paces. Anything that happened from then on was the vet's fault, Chick thought. The vet's responsibility, absolutely. The man was a criminal menace, letting a horse run in a steeplechase with dope coming out of its eyeballs.

Toddy Morrison had joined his father in the parade ring and together they were watching with worried expressions as the chestnut plodded lethargically around the oval walking track. Toddy was a strong, stocky professional jockey in his late

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twenties, with an infectious grin and a generous view of life that represented a direct rejection of his father's. He had inherited the same strength of mind but had used it to leave home at 18 to ride races for other trainers, and had only consented to ride for his father when he could dictate his own terms. Arthur Morrison, in consequence, respected him deeply. Between them they had won a lot of races.

Chick didn't actually dislike Toddy, even though, as he saw it, Toddy stood in his way. Occasionally Arthur let Chick ride a race if Toddy had something better or couldn't make the weight. Chick had to share these scraps from Toddy's table with two or three other lads in the yard who were, though he didn't believe it, as good as he was in the saddle. But though the envy curdled around inside him and the snide remarks came out sharp and sour as vinegar, he had never actually come to hate Toddy.

There was something about Toddy that you couldn't hate, however good the reason. Chick hadn't given a thought to the fact that it would be Toddy who would have to deal with the effects of the carrot. He had seen no farther than his own pocket. He wished now that it had been some other jockey.

The conviction suddenly crystalized in Chick's mind as he looked at Toddy and Morrison standing there worried in the parade ring that he had never believed the chestnut would actually start in the race. The stranger, Chick said to himself, had distinctly told him the horse would be too sick to start. I wouldn't have done it, else, Chick thought virtuously. I wouldn't have done it. It's bloody dangerous, riding a doped steeplechaser. I wouldn't have done that to Toddy. It's not my fault he's going to ride a doped steeplechaser, it's that vet's fault for not seeing. It's that stranger's fault, he told me distinctly the horse wouldn't be fit to start. . .

Chick remembered with an unpleasant jerk that he'd been two hours late with the carrot. Maybe if he'd been on time the drug would have come out more and the vet would have seen. . .

Chick jettisoned this unbearable theory instantly on the grounds that no one can tell how seriously any particular horse will react to a drug or how quickly it will work, and he repeated to himself the comforting self-delusion that the stranger had promised him the horse wouldn't ever start—though the stranger had not, in fact, said any such thing. The

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stranger, who was at the races, was entirely satisfied with the way things were going and was on the point of making a great deal of money.

The bell rang for the jockeys to mount. Chick clenched his hands in his pockets and tried not to visualize what could happen to a rider going over jumps at 30 miles an hour on a doped horse. Chick's body began playing him tricks again: he could feel the sweat pricking down his back and the pulse had come back in his ears.

Supposing he told them, he thought. Supposing he just ran out there into the ring and told Toddy not to ride the horse, it hadn't a chance of jumping properly, it was certain to fall, it could kill him bloody easily because its reactions would be all shot to bits.

Supposing he did. The way they'd look at him. His imagination blew a fuse and blanked out on that picture because such a blast of contempt didn't fit in with his overgrown self-esteem. He could not, could *not* face the fury they would feel.

And it might not end there. Even if he told them and saved Toddy's life, they might tell the police. He wouldn't put it past them. And he could end up in the dock. Even in jail. They weren't going to do that to him, not to *him*. He wasn't going to give them the chance. He should have been paid a higher salary. Paid more because he was worth more. If he'd been paid more, he wouldn't have needed to take the stranger's money. Arthur Morrison had only himself to blame.

Toddy would have to risk it. After all, the horse didn't look too bad, and the vet had passed it, hadn't he, and maybe the carrot being two hours late was all to the good and it wouldn't have done its work properly yet, it was really thanks to Chick if it hadn't; only thanks to him that the drug was two hours late and that nothing much would happen, really, anyway. Nothing much would happen. Maybe the chestnut wouldn't actually *win*, but Toddy would come through all right. Of course he would.

The jockeys swung up into their saddles, Toddy among them. He saw Chick in the crowd, watching, and sketched an acknowledging wave. The urge to tell and the fear of telling tore Chick apart like the Chinese trees.

Toddy gathered up the reins and clicked his tongue and steered the chestnut indecisively out onto the track. He was disappointed that the horse wasn't feeling well but not in the least apprehensive. It hadn't

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occurred to him, or to Arthur Morrison, that the horse might be doped.

He cantered down to the post standing in his stirrups, replanning his tactics mentally now that he couldn't rely on reserves in his mount. It would be a difficult race now to win. Pity.

Chick watched him go. He hadn't come to his decision, to tell or not to tell. The moment simply passed him by. When Toddy had gone he unstuck his leaden feet and plodded off to the stands to watch the race, and in every corner of his mind little self-justifications sprang up like nettles. A feeling of shame tried to creep in round the edges, but he kicked it out smartly. They should have paid him more. It was their fault, not his.

He thought about the wad of notes the stranger had given him with the carrot. Money in advance. The stranger had trusted him, which was more than most people seemed to. He'd locked himself into the bathroom and counted the notes, counted them twice, and they were all there, £300 just as the stranger had promised. He had never had so much money all at once in his life before. Perhaps he never would again, he thought. And if he'd told Arthur Morrison and Toddy about the dope, he would have to give up that money, give up the money and more.

Finding somewhere to hide the money had given him difficulty. Three hundred used £1 notes had turned out to be quite bulky, and he didn't want to risk his ma poking around among his things, like she did, and coming across them. He'd solved the problem temporarily by rolling them up and putting them in a brightly colored round tin which had once held toffees but which he used for years for storing brushes and polish for cleaning his shoes. He had covered the money with a duster and jammed the brushes back in on top and put the tin back on the shelf in his bedroom where it always stood. He thought he would probably have to find somewhere safer, in the end.

And he'd have to be careful how he spent the money—there would be too many questions asked if he just went out and bought a car. He'd always wanted a car. . .and now he had the money for one. . .and he still couldn't get the car. It wasn't fair. Not fair at all. If they'd paid him more. . .enough for a car. . .

Up on the well-positioned area of stands set aside for trainers and jockeys, a small man with hot dark eyes put his

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hand on Chick's arm and spoke to him, though it was several seconds before Chick started to listen.

". . .I see you are here, and you're free, so will you ride it?"

"What?" said Chick vaguely.

"My horse in the Novice Hurdle," said the little man impatiently. "Of course, if you don't want to—"

"Didn't say that," Chick mumbled. "Ask the guvnor. If he says I can, well, I can."

The small trainer walked across the stand to where Arthur Morrison was watching the chestnut intently through his race glasses and asked the same question he'd put to Chick.

"Chick? Yes, he can ride for you, if you want him." Morrison gave the other trainer two full seconds of his attention and glued himself back onto his race glasses.

"My jockey was hurt in a fall in the first race," explained the small man. "There are so many runners in the Novice Hurdle that there's a shortgage of jockeys. I just saw that boy of yours, so I asked him on the spur of the moment, see?"

"Yes, yes," said Morrison, ninety percent uninterested. "He's moderately capable, but don't expect too much of him." There was no spring in the chestnut's stride. Morrison wondered in depression if he was sickening for the cough.

"My horse won't win. Just out for experience you might say," the man said.

"Yes. Well, fix it with Chick." Several other stables had the coughing epidemic, Morrison thought. The chestnut couldn't have picked a worse day to catch it.

Chick, who would normally have welcomed the offer of a ride with condescending complacency, was so preoccupied that the small trainer regretted having asked him. Chick's whole attention was riveted on the chestnut, who seemed to be lining up satisfactorily at the starting tape. Nothing wrong, Chick assured himself. Everything was going to be all right. Of course it was. Stupid getting into such a state.

The start was down the track to the left, with two fences to be jumped before the horses came past the stands and swung away again on the left-hand circuit. As it was a jumping race, they were using tapes instead of stalls, and as there was no draw either, Toddy had lined up against the inside rails, ready to take the shortest way home.

Down in the bookmakers' enclosure they were offering more generous odds now and some had gone boldly to evens.

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The chestnut had cantered past them on his way to the start, looking not his brightest and best. The bookmakers in consequence were feeling more hopeful. They had expected a bad day, but if the chestnut lost, they would profit. One of them would profit terrifically—just as he would lose terrifically if the chestnut won.

Alexander McGrant (Est. 1898), real name Harry Buskins, had done this sort of thing once before. He spread out his fingers and looked at them admiringly. Not a tremble in sight. And there was always a risk in these things that the boy he'd bribed would get cold feet at the last minute and not go through with the job. Always a gamble, it was. But this time, this boy, he was pretty sure of. You couldn't go wrong if you sorted out a vain little so-and-so with a big grudge. Knockovers, that sort were. Every time.

Harry Buskins was a shrewd middle-aged East End Londoner for whom there had never been any clear demarcation between right and wrong and a man who thought that if you could rig a nice little swindle now and then, well, why not? The turnover tax was killing betting—you had to make a quick buck where you could—and there was nothing quite as sure or quick as raking in the dough on a red-hot favorite and knowing for certain that you weren't going to have to pay out.

Down at the post the starter put his hand on the lever and the tapes went up with a rush. Toddy kicked his chestnut smartly in the ribs. From his aerie on top of the stand the commentator moved smartly into his spiel, "They're off, and the first to show is the gray."

Arthur Morrison and Chick watched with hearts thumping from different sorts of anxiety, and Harry Buskins shut his eyes and prayed.

Toddy drove forward at once into the first three, the chestnut beneath him galloping strongly, pulling at the bit, thudding his hooves into the ground. He seemed to be going well enough, Toddy thought. Strong. Like a train.

The first fence lay only 100 yards ahead now, coming nearer. With a practised eye Toddy measured the distance, knew the chestnut's stride would meet it right, collected himself for the spring, and gave the horse the signal to take off. There was no response. Nothing. The chestnut made no attempt to bunch his muscles, no attempt to gather himself onto his haunches, no attempt to waver or slow down or take any avoiding action whatsoever. For one incredulous second

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Toddy knew he was facing complete and imminent disaster.

The chestnut galloped straight into the three-foot-thick, chest-high solid birch fence with an impact that brought a groan of horror from the stands. He turned a somersault over the fence with a flurry of thrashing legs, threw Toddy off in front of him, fell down on top, and rolled over him.

Chick felt as if the world were turning gray. The colors drained out of everything and he was halfway to fainting. Oh, God, he thought. Oh, God. *Toddy.*

The chestnut scrambled to his feet and galloped away. He followed the other horses toward the second fence, stretching out into a relentless stride, into a full-fledged thundering racing pace.

He hit the second fence as straight and hard as the first. The crowd gasped and cried out. Again the somersault, the spreadeagled legs, the crashing fall, the instant recovery. The chestnut surged up again and galloped on.

He came up past the stands, moving inexorably, the stirrups swinging out from the empty saddle, flecks of foam flying back now from his mouth, great dark patches of sweat staining his flanks. Where the track curved round to the left, the chestnut raced straight on. Straight on across the curve, to crash into the rail around the outside of the track.

He took the solid timber across the chest and broke it in two. Again he fell in a thrashing heap and again he rocketed to his feet. But this time not to gallop away. This time he took three painful limping steps and stood still.

Back at the fence Toddy lay on the ground with first-aid men bending over him anxiously. Arthur Morrison ran down from the stands toward the track and didn't know which way to turn first, to his son or his horse. Chick's legs gave way and he sagged down in a daze onto the concrete steps.

And down in the bookmakers' enclosure Harry Buskins' first reaction of delight was soured by wondering whether, if Toddy Morrison were badly injured, that stupid boy Chick would be scared enough to keep his mouth shut.

Arthur Morrison turned toward his son. Toddy had been knocked unconscious by the fall and had had all the breath squeezed out of him by the chestnut's weight, but by the time his father was within 100 yards he was beginning to come round. As soon as Arthur saw

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the supine figure move, he turned brusquely round and hurried off toward the horse: it would never do to show Toddy the concern he felt. Toddy would not respect him for it, he thought.

The chestnut stood patiently by the smashed rail, only dimly aware of the dull discomfort in the foreleg that wouldn't take his weight. Arthur Morrison and the veterinarian arrived beside him at the same time, and Arthur Morrison glared at the vet.

"You said he was fit to run. The owner is going to hit the roof when he hears about it."

Morrison tried to keep a grip on a growing internal fury at the injustice of fate. The chestnut wasn't just any horse —it was the best he'd ever trained, had hoisted him higher up the stakes-won list than he was ever likely to go again.

"Well, he seemed all right," said the vet defensively.

"I want a dope test done," Morrison said truculently.

"He's broken his shoulder. He'll have to be put down."

"I know. I've got eyes. All the same, I want a dope test first. Just being ill wouldn't have made him act like that."

The veterinarian reluctantly agreed to take a blood sample, and after that he fitted the bolt into the humane killer and shot it into the chestnut's drug-dazed brain. The best horse in Arthur Morrison's stable became only a name in the record books. The digested carrot was dragged away with the carcass but its damage was by no means spent.

It took Chick ten minutes to realize that it was Toddy who was alive and the horse that was dead, during which time he felt physically ill and mentally pulverized. It had seemed so small a thing, in the beginning, to give a carrot to the chestnut. He hadn't thought of it affecting him much. He'd never dreamed anything like that could make you really sick.

Once he found that Toddy had broken no bones, had recovered consciousness, and would be on his feet in an hour or two, the bulk of his physical symptoms receded. When the small trainer appeared at his elbow to remind him sharply that he should be inside changing into colors to ride in the Novice Hurdle race, he felt fit enough to go and do it, though he wished in a way that he hadn't said he would.

In the changing room he forgot to tell his valet he needed a lightweight saddle and that the trainer had asked for a breast girth. He forgot to tie the stock round his neck and would have gone out to ride with the

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ends flapping. He forgot to take his watch off. His valet pointed everything out and thought that the jockey looked drunk.

The novice hurdler Chick was to ride wouldn't have finished within a mile of the chestnut if the chestnut started the day before. Young, green, sketchily schooled, the novice hadn't even the virtue of a gold streak waiting to be mined: this was one destined to run in the ruck until the owner tired of trying.

Check hadn't bothered to find out. He'd been much too preoccupied to look in the form book, where a consistent row of naughts might have made him cautious. As it was, he mounted the horse without attention and didn't listen to the riding orders the small trainer insistently gave him. As usual, he thought he knew better. Play it off the cuff, he thought scrappily. Play it off the cuff. How could he listen to fussy little instructions with all that he had on his mind?

On his way out from the weighing room he passed Arthur Morrison, who cast an inattentive eye over his racing colors and said, "Oh, yes... well, don't make too much of a mess of it."

Morrison was still thinking about the difference the chestnut's death was going to make to his fortunes and he didn't notice the spasm of irritation that twisted Chick's petulant face.

There he goes, Chick thought. That's typical. *Typical.* Never thinks I can do a bloody thing. If he'd given me more chances—and more money—I wouldn't have given ...well, I wouldn't have. He cantered down to the post, concentrating on resenting that remark, "don't make too much of a mess of it," because it made him feel justified for having done what he'd done. The abyss of remorse opening beneath him was too painful. He clutched at every lie to keep himself out.

Harry Buskins had noticed that Chick had an unexpected mount in the Novice Hurdle and concluded that he himself was safe, the boy wasn't going to crack. All the same, he had shut his bag over its swollen takings and left his pitch for the day and gone home, explaining to his colleagues that he didn't feel well. And in truth he didn't. He couldn't get out of his mind the sight of the chestnut charging at those fences as if he couldn't see. Blind, the horse had been. A great racer who knew he was on a racetrack starting a race. Didn't understand there was anything wrong with him.

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Galloped because he was asked to gallop, because he knew it was the right place for it. A great horse, with a great racing heart.

Harry Buskins mopped the sweat off his forehead. They were bound to have tested the horse for dope, he thought, after something like that. None of the others he'd done in the past had reacted that way. Maybe he'd got the dose wrong or the timing wrong. You never knew how individual horses would be affected. Doping was always a bit unpredictable.

He poured himself half a tumbler of whiskey with fingers that were shaking, and when he felt calmer he decided that if he got away with it this time he would be satisfied with the cleanup he'd made, and he wouldn't fool around with any more carrots. He just wouldn't risk it again.

Chick lined up at the starting post in the center of the field, even though the trainer had advised him to start on the outside to give the inexperienced horse an easy passage over the first few hurdles. Chick didn't remember this instruction because he hadn't listened, and even if he had listened he would have done the same, driven by his habitual compulsion to disagree. He was thinking about Toddy lining up on this spot an hour ago, not knowing that his horse wouldn't see the jumps.

Chick hadn't known dope could make a horse blind. How could anyone expect that? It didn't make sense. Perhaps it was just that the dope had confused the chestnut so much that although its eyes saw the fence, the message didn't get through that he was supposed to jump over it. The chestnut couldn't have been really blind.

Chick sweated at the thought and forgot to check that the girths were still tight after cantering down to the p[illegible]. His mind was still on the inward horror when the starter let the tapes up, so that he was caught unawares and flat-footed and got away slowly. The small trainer on the stand clicked his mouth in annoyance, and Arthur Morrison raised his eyes to heaven.

The first hurdle lay side by side with the first fence, and all the way to it Chick was illogically scared that his horse wouldn't rise to it. He spent the attention he should have given to setting his horse right in desperately trying to convince himself that no one could have given it a carrot. He couldn't be riding a doped horse himself—it wouldn't be fair. Why wouldn't it be fair? Because—because—

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The hurdler scrambled over the jump, knocked himself hard on the timber frame, and landed almost at a standstill. The small trainer began to curse.

Chick tightened one loose rein and then the other, and the hurdler swung to and fro in wavering indecision. He needed to be ridden with care and confidence and to be taught balance and rhythm. He needed to be set right before the jumps and to be quickly collected afterward. He lacked experience, he lacked judgment, and he badly needed a jockey who could contribute both.

Chick could have made a reasonable job of it if he'd been trying. Instead, with nausea and mental exhaustion draining what skill he had out of his muscles, he was busy proving that he'd never be much good.

At the second fence he saw in his mind's eye the chestnut somersaulting through the air, and going round the bend his gaze wavered across to the broken rail and the scuffed-up patches of turf in front of it. The chestnut had died there. Everyone in the stable would be poorer for it. He had killed the chestnut, there was no avoiding it any more, he'd killed it with that carrot as surely as if he'd shot the bolt himself. Chick sobbed suddenly, and his eyes filled with tears

He didn't see the next two hurdles. They passed beneath him in a flying blur. He stayed on his horse by instinct, and the tears ran down and were swept away as they trickled under the edge of his jockey's goggles.

The green hurdler was frightened and rudderless. Another jump lay close ahead, and the horses in front went clattering through it, knocking one section half over and leaving it there at an angle. The hurdler waited until the last minute for help or instructions from the man on his back and then in a muddled way dived for the leaning section, which looked lower to him and easier to jump than the other end.

From the stands it was clear to both the small trainer and Arthur Morrison that Chick had made no attempt to keep straight or to tell the horse when to take off. It landed with its forefeet tangled up in the sloping hurdle and catapulted Chick off over its head.

The instinct of self-preservation which should have made Chick curl into a rolling ball wasn't working. He fell through the air flat and straight, and his last thought before he hit was that that stupid little sod of a trainer hadn't schooled his horse properly. The animal hadn't a clue how to jump.

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Chick woke up a long time later in a high bed in a small room. There was a dim light burning somewhere. He could feel no pain. He could feel nothing at all. His brain seemed to be floating in his head and his head was floating in space.

After a long time he began to believe that he was dead. He took the thought calmly and was proud of himself for his calm. A long time after that he began to realize that he wasn't dead. There was some sort of casing round his head, holding it cushioned. He couldn't move.

He blinked his eyes consciously and licked his lips to make sure that they at least were working. He couldn't think what had happened. His thoughts were a confused but peaceful fog.

Finally he remembered the carrot, and the whole complicated agony washed back into his consciousness. He cried out in protest and tried to move, to get up and away, to escape the impossible, unbearable guilt. People heard his voice and came into the room and stood around him. He looked at them uncomprehendingly. They were dressed in white.

"You're all right, now," they said. "Don't worry, young man. You're going to be all right."

"I can't move," he protested.

"You will," they said soothingly.

"I can't feel anything. I can't feel my feet." The panic rose suddenly in his voice. "I can't feel my hands. I can't—move—my hands." He was shouting, frightened, his eyes wide and stretched.

"Don't worry," they said. "You will in time. You're going to be all right."

He didn't believe them, and they pumped a sedative into his arm to quiet him. He couldn't feel the prick of the needle. He heard himself screaming because he could feel no pain.

When he woke up again he knew for certain that he'd broken his neck.

After four days Arthur Morrison came to see him, bringing six new-laid eggs and a bottle of fresh orange juice. He stood looking down at the immobile body with the plaster cast round its shoulders and head.

"Well, Chick," he said awkwardly. "It's not as bad as it could have been, eh?"

Chick said rudely, "I'm glad you think so."

"They say your spinal cord isn't severed, it's just crushed. They say in a year or so you'll get a lot of movement back. And they say you'll begin to feel things any day now."

"They say," said Chick

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sneeringly. "I don't believe them."

"You'll have to, in time," said Morrison impatiently.

Chick didn't answer, and Arthur Morrison cast uncomfortably around in his mind for something to say to pass away the minutes until he could decently leave. He couldn't visit the boy and just stand there in silence. He had to say *something.* So he began to talk about what was uppermost in his mind.

"We had the result of the dope test this morning. Did you know we had the chestnut tested? Well, you know we had to have it put down anyway. The results came this morning. They were positive. *Positive.* The chestnut was full of some sort of narcotic drug, some long name. The owner is kicking up hell about it and so is the insurance company. They're trying to say it's my fault. My security arrangements aren't tight enough. It's ridiculous. And all this on top of losing the horse itself, losing that really great horse. I questioned everyone in the stable this morning as soon as I knew about the dope, but of course no one knew anything. God, if I knew who did it I'd strangle him myself."

It occurred to him at this point that Chick being Chick, he would be exclusively concerned with his own state and wouldn't care a damn for anyone else's troubles. Arthur Morrison sighed deeply. Chick did have his own troubles now, right enough. He couldn't be expected to care all that much about the chestnut. And he was looking very weak, very pale.

The doctor who checked on Chick's condition ten times a day came quietly into the small room.

"He's doing well," he said. "Getting on splendidly."

"Nuts," Chick said.

The doctor twisted his lips. He didn't say he had found Chick the worst-tempered patient in the hospital. He said, "Of course it's hard on him. But it could have been worse. It'll take time—he'll need to learn everything again, you see. It'll take time."

"Like a bloody baby," Chick said violently.

Arthur Morrison thought, a baby again. Well, perhaps second time around they could make a better job of him.

"He's lucky he's got good parents to look after him once he goes home," the doctor said.

Chick thought of his mother, forever chopping up carrots to put in the stew. He'd have to eat them. His throat closed convulsively. He knew he couldn't.

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And then there was the money, rolled up in the shoe-cleaning tin on the shelf in his bedroom. He would be able to see the tin all the time when he was lying in his own bed. He would never be able to forget. Never. And there was always the danger his ma would look inside it. He couldn't face going home. He couldn't face it. And he knew he would have to. He had no choice. He wished he were dead.

Arthur Morrison sighed heavily and shouldered his new burden with his accustomed strength of mind. "Yes, he can come home to his mother and me as soon as he's well enough. He'll always have us to rely on."

Chick Morrison winced with despair and shut his eyes. His father tried to stifle a surge of irritation, and the doctor thought the boy an ungrateful little beast.

"O"

NEXT MONTH . . .

32nd Anniversary Issue!

ALL-STAR!

10 NEW stories — including

NGAIO MARSH *(about Inspector Roderick Alleyn)*

ISAAC ASIMOV *(about the Black Widowers)*

JULIAN SYMONS *(about Francis Quarles)*

PATRICIA HIGHSMITH *(different even for her)*

ANTHONY GILBERT *(different for her too)*

EDWARD D. HOCH *(about Captain Leopold)*

and Part One of an unusual article by

JOHN DICKSON CARR *(about English highwaymen)*

and an Honor Roll reprint by

AGATHA CHRISTIE *(about Hercule Poirot)*

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BREAKNECK

a Dick Francis "miniature novel"

by JON L. BREEN

Lying in the mud, before the Colonel's chestnut clipped me with his right foreleg and knocked me senseless, I thought about Trudy Abbot's remark about small men always having to prove something. When I awoke in hospital, I had to pinch myself to prove I was alive. Moments later the arrows of pain in every fiber of my body made such a test unnecessary. I was alive and looking into Rud Mosby's scowling face.

I winced with the pain but got no sympathy.

"Wot happened?" he demanded.

"That gelding's no jumper, that's all."

"Don't tell me that! I've been training jumpers thirty years, and that's a jumper."

"Shadows he jumps, but fences are a bit of a sticky wicket for him. Did he come through all right?"

"He came through better than you. But we shot him anyway."

"Oh. It was the Colonel's chestnut got me with his right fore."

"I know. The jockey claimed interference against your bloody head."

"Did the stewards allow it?"

"No, but you're suspended for a fortnight. And you'll never ride for me again, I can tell you."

Trudy came later. "Have to ride them, don't you?"

"It's my work."

"A certified librarian, and you have to ride those damned jumpers. Little men always have to prove something. I fancy you fell off that horse and got kicked just so I'd come running and say I loved you. True, isn't it?"

"I wanted to stay on and win."

"Huh! A lot you care about how I feel. And a certified librarian you are, too."

"I can't be around books all day. I have a dust allergy."

"You'll never change. Give us a little kiss."

"I can't move. I'm in great pain."

"Little men always have to prove something," she said, and walked out.

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At midnight after the night nurse had gone, three big blokes came into my room and beat me senseless with truncheons and riding crops. Nobody heard my screams and they found me in the morning. I was a bloody mess and a bit of an embarrassment to a tour going round the hospital.

At noon they discharged me, but I couldn't get any horses to ride at the Cleckheaton races. None of the trainers would talk to me. Soon I remembered I was sent down for a fortnight and I went to fly my plane. I smashed up in a cornfield and the farmer chased me off with a pitchfork. I brought back the local bobby from the next town, riding on his crossbar, but all traces of my plane wreckage were gone. It made me a bit suspicious.

I went to see Trudy and told her things were not going well for me. She put me to work cataloguing her library. I had a sneezing fit. She said I was disgusting and told me to go away.

As soon as I stepped out of the door I saw the three blokes who'd beat me up. They took off in a Jaguar. I stole a horse from the stable and followed them to the farm where I'd crashed my plane.

I'd picked the horse at random, but he was more of a jumper than the crab that Rud Mosby had put me on the day before. He took the fences well but not too quietly. The three blokes saw me coming, and soon they came after me with their riding crops and truncheons, the farmer following closely with his pitchfork.

Knocked off my mount, I noticed his right fore hoof. It was the Colonel's chestnut. I should have recognized him before. Then Trudy knew the Colonel!

The chestnut helped me fight them off, flailing his hooves, as a good jumper will. I tied them all to the farmer's privy and took off for the Cleckheaton racecourse.

The trap was laid at the fourth fence. I could see them in the distance, the three crouched figures lurking behind the fence, hidden from the view of the riders and from the stands far in the distance.

I joined the field on the flat and surged to the front. The chestnut's ears twitched competitively. The stands were too far away for them to tell I was an interloper, though I had no silks on, only my flying togs. The other riders noticed, and shouted at me, but I pulled away from them. I had to reach that jump first.

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The chestnut took the jump beautifully. At the height of his soaring leap, just as he cleared the fence, I dived from his back and wrestled with the three hidden figures: Rud Mosby, the Colonel, Trudy Abbot.

"All in it together, were you?" I cried. "Your horse betrayed you, Colonel, like a good jumper will."

I threw them all in a pile, clear of the charging field, but as the seventeen of them cleared the fence, a big bay mare clipped me with her left fore and knocked me senseless.

Waking up in hospital, aching in every bone, I told a Scotland Yard man about the plot to end racing in Britain forever. He assured me Trudy, Mosby, the Colonel, the farmer, and the three blokes were all safely rounded up.

The Colonel's chestnut was cited by the Jockey Club for heroism.

I was warned off for life.

It gives me lots of time to fly.

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULATION (Act of August 12, 1970: Section 3685, Title 39, United States Code)

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I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete.

Business Manager
V. C. Stabile

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THE 12 MOST FAMOUS DETECTIVES

Dear Reader:

As you may know, Nicaragua issued a commemorative set of 12 postage stamps (increased from 10, the number originally announced) to celebrate the 50th Anniversary, this year, of Interpol. The issue date was November 13, 1972, and the set is now available at your local stamp dealer.

Also, as you may know, Nicaragua decided to use portraits of the 12 most famous sleuths of fiction, and asked *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* to conduct a poll to establish the dozen greatest detectives of all time.

Actually, we conducted three different polls, and received 66 ballots from mystery critics and editors, 91 ballots from mystery writers, and 1090 ballots from mystery readers. The separate results were:

	Critics & Editors	*Mystery Writers*	*Mystery Readers*
1.	Sherlock Holmes	Sherlock Holmes	Sherlock Holmes
2.	Ellery Queen	Ellery Queen	Hercule Poirot
3.	Hercule Poirot	Hercule Poirot	Ellery Queen
4.	C. Auguste Dupin	Maigret	Nero Wolfe
5.	Perry Mason	Nero Wolfe	Perry Mason
6.	Nero Wolfe	Father Brown	Charlie Chan
7.	Maigret	Perry Mason	Miss Marple
8.	Father Brown	C. Auguste Dupin	Maigret
9.	Charlie Chan	Philip Marlowe	C. Auguste Dupin
10.	Sam Spade	Peter Wimsey	Sam Spade
11.	Peter Wimsey	Sam Spade	Father Brown
12.	Philip Marlowe	Charlie Chan	George Gideon

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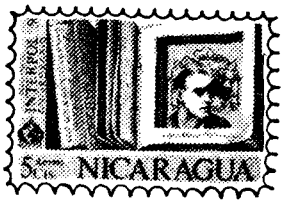
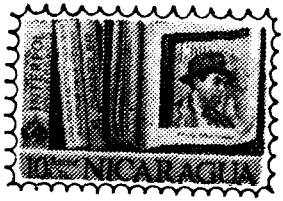
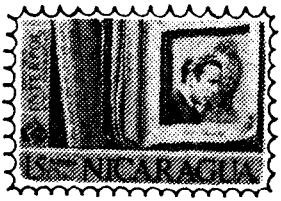
Only one fictional detective was voted for unanimously by mystery critics, mystery editors, and mystery writers—not surprisingly, Sherlock Holmes. But surprisingly, the vote for Sherlock Holmes by mystery readers was not unanimous—no less than 64 readers out of 1090 failed to rank Holmes as one of the 12 best and greatest. Surprising, indeed. (Surprising? Incredible!)

If you compare the three lists, you will note other surprising things. For example, Miss Marple and Gideon made the list of 12 with readers, but not with critics, editors, and writers. Conversely, Wimsey and Marlowe were included in the lists of 12 by critics, editors, and writers, but not by readers, who placed Wimsey number 13 and Marlowe number 17.

Here is the definitive list, based on an analysis of all the votes, of the 12 most famous detectives of fiction, the 12 greatest of all time, with the philatelic denominations chosen by Nicaragua:







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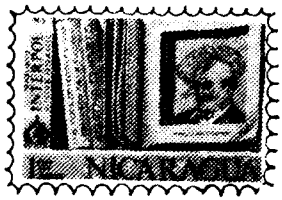

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5 cts. Dorothy L. Sayers's Lord Peter Wimsey
10 cts. Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe
15 cts. Dashiell Hammett's Sam Spade
20 cts. Erle Stanley Gardner's Perry Mason
25 cts. Rex Stout's Nero Wolfe
35 cts. Edgar Allan Poe's C. Auguste Dupin
40 cts. Frederic Dannay's & Manfred B. Lee's Ellery Queen
50 cts. G. K. Chesterton's Father Brown
60 cts. Earl Derr Biggers's Charlie Chan
80 cts. Georges Simenon's Inspector Maigret
1.00 Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot
2.00 A. Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes

The immediate runners-up were Agatha Christie's Miss Marple (we suggested that Nicaragua show a double portrait on the 1.00 denomination—Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple—but production difficulties would not permit), J. J. Marric's George Gideon, John Dickson Carr's Dr. Gideon Fell, S. S. Van Dine's Philo Vance, Ross Macdonald's Lew Archer, and Margery Allingham's Albert Campion. Ballots were also cast for Leslie Charteris's Simon Templar (The Saint), Ngaio Marsh's Roderick Alleyn, Dell Shannon's Luis Mendoza, Carter Dickson's Sir Henry Merrivale, Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer, Ian Fleming's James Bond, Wilkie Collins's Sergeant Cuff, John Creasey's Inspector Roger West, with a scattering of votes for many others.

We wish to express our deep gratitude to all who voted—to the mystery critics and editors, to the mystery writers, and to the mystery readers, many of whom took the time and trouble not only to cast their ballots but to write interesting letters offering valuable comments and opinions—too many letters for your Editor and his staff to answer individually; and our deep thanks also to William D. Cox who first suggested the theme to Nicaragua—an inspired idea for which all of us will remain forever in his debt.

Happy reading and happy stamp collecting!

ELLERY QUEEN

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the first of a *NEW* series about

INTERPOL

by EDWARD D. HOCH

To tie in with the announcement of the twelve most famous detectives of fiction, the twelve greatest fictional sleuths of all time, we inaugurate a new series of stories. The results of the voting for the twelve best-known 'tecs will be found on pages 140-143 of this issue, together with portraits of the twelve most famous characters as they appear on the Nicaraguan stamps issued to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Interpol. How better can we celebrate the occasion than to give you a short story about Interpol—a series opener by one of EQMM's most popular writers, Edward D. Hoch, of Nick Velvet and Rand fame.

Meet Sebastian Blue, formerly of Scotland Yard, and Laura Charme, a translator at Interpol, in their first adventure together—their strange encounter with a religious cult known as the Apostles of the Sun . . .

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INTERPOL:

THE CASE OF THE THIRD APOSTLE

by EDWARD D. HOCH

The saffron-robed figure stood with his arms upraised toward heaven, chanting a hymn in an unknown tongue. He seemed to hover there, at the edge of the airfield, like some great bird which might itself take wing. Finally, as the mammoth jetliner taxied out to the end of the runway, he reached beneath his robe and brought out a single stick of incense. Lighting it, he held it high above his head, like a glowing signal to guide the plane on its path.

When at last the silver jetliner streaked through the evening sky, making a wide circle south of Paris, the man in the saffron robe placed his stick of burning incense carefully at the edge of the runway and walked back across the field to the car which had brought him.

As he walked, he wondered if his prayer would be answered.

When Sebastian Blue entered the sprawling modern building on the Rue Armengaud, he could not help reflecting that the International Criminal Police Organization had come a long way from the unpretentious stone house just off the Avenue Victor Hugo, which had been Interpol's home from 1955 till 1966. This glass-walled building in the western suburbs of Paris, with its rooftop radio transmitters and underground parking, seemed to hum with activity, and there were only the flags at the entrance to remind him of that earlier headquarters.

The Secretary-General spoke English with a decided accent, and he made it obvious that like most Frenchmen he much preferred his native tongue. "Is this your first visit to our new headquarters?" he asked, extending a hand in greeting.

"It is, and I'm quite impressed. I remember calling at the old place back in 1966, just before you moved. This is a vast improvement."

"We must expand with the task," the Secretary-General replied, the overhead lights

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reflecting off his bald head. "But it is a pleasure to have you here, Mr. Blue. Your former Scotland Yard colleagues speak most highly of you."

"I trust I can be of some service here. They tell me Interpol employs a great many former detectives from the *Surete Nationale* and the Paris *Prefecture.*"

"We do indeed," the Secretary-General confirmed. His eyes narrowed as he studied the tall well-built Englishman opposite him. He might have been wondering what caused a handsome gray-haired Scotland Yard Inspector still in his forties to desert job and country for a new life in Paris. "I must warn you, Mr. Blue, that the work of Interpol is mainly in the fields of information exchange, identification and research. The actual apprehension of international criminals remains the task of member countries. You might find our work somewhat dull after your years with the Yard."

"I hardly think it will be dull, sir."

"Very well. As you know, our headquarters here in Saint-Cloud maintains direct radio communications with nearly one hundred affiliated governments. We serve as a clearing-house for information, with files on more than 250,000 international criminals indexed by physical description, nationality, character traits, and types of crime. Whatever the offense—picking pockets at the Olympic games, smuggling gold into India, stealing art masterpieces from Swiss museums and selling them abroad—if it is international in scope, Interpol is interested."

"And that is why I can be of special service," Sebastian Blue said. "During my years with the Yard I specialized in airline crimes—cargo thefts from Heathrow, bomb threats, smuggling, skyjacking. By its very nature, airline crime often involves the police of several nations. I believe it's time Interpol took a more active role in this field."

The Secretary-General nodded. "We have been thinking along much the same lines, and have had some success already. You may remember the time we uncovered a large shipment of opium hidden in a plane-load of monkeys destined for polio research in America. The odor of the monkeys was used to mask the penetrating smell of the opium."

"I recall the case," Sebastian said. "But that was years ago. Today there are bombings and extortion threats—"

The Secretary-General cut

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him off. "We may give you an assignment sooner than you expected." He pushed a button and spoke some quick words in French through the intercom. After a few moments a slim young woman with reddish-blonde hair entered the office carrying a folder. "Sebastian Blue, this is Laura Charme, one of our ablest translators."

"Pleased to meet you," the young woman said in surprisingly good English.

Sebastian stood up to acknowledge the introduction, taking in the wide green eyes and lovely lips. "You're not my idea of a translator," he said.

She tossed her head prettily. "Looks can be deceiving," she told him as she handed the folder to the Secretary-General and left the office.

"Is she English?" Sebastian asked the Secretary-General when they were alone.

"Her mother was, but her father is French. Laura is a very versatile young woman." Without explaining further, he opened the folder and asked, "Have you ever heard of the Apostles of the Sun? They are an odd religious cult with headquarters in Istanbul."

"It's a bit out of my line," Sebastian admitted.

"Their main activity in Paris seems to be the raising of funds. You see them out along the Seine in their saffron robes, chanting in some strange tongue and begging money from tourists and students."

"What's your problem with them?"

"It is not really our problem, but the Paris police have asked for help. It seems the Apostles of the Sun refuse to have dealings with banks. As a result, their annual contributions to the world headquarters must be carried to Istanbul by special messengers. Since the sum of money involved is quite large—nearly $100,000 American in all—three messengers are sent from Paris by plane, one week apart. Each carries a third of the contribution."

"Their fund-raising is big business," Sebastian agreed. "But why trust planes and not banks?"

The Secretary-General sighed. "Planes fly nearer the sun, and therefore are good. Banks hide their money in dark vaults and therefore are bad. It is all a part of their religious beliefs."

"I see. And something happened to the messengers?"

"The first two have vanished."

"With the money?"

"With the money. They boarded the planes in their saffron robes, and disappeared in the sky somewhere between Paris and Istanbul. Of course

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there is no great mystery. On a 747, with hundreds of passengers roaming the aisles and frequenting the lounges, our Apostle could simply have stepped into the lavatory, doffed his robe, covered his shaved head with a wig, and reappeared as a whole new person, taking an empty seat near the rear of the aircraft. The people waiting his arrival in Istanbul would swear there was no Apostle on the plane."

"Then what's the mystery?" Sebastian asked. "It's a simple case of embezzlement."

"The supreme council of the Apostles of the Sun assures the police that embezzlement is out of the question. The two men were among the most trusted and dedicated in the order, and were personally chosen as messengers by the council in Istanbul."

"How does Interpol fit in?"

"Whatever happened, it was between Paris and Istanbul, on that aircraft. Our task is to coordinate the investigations of the French and Turkish police, and to furnish descriptions of the missing men. Would you like to call on the Apostles here in Paris and obtain the information? Photographs would be most helpful, of course."

"How soon do we need it?"

"Time may be important," the Secretary-General said. "The third Apostle leaves for Istanbul tomorrow evening."

The temple of the Apostles of the Sun was a garishly imposing structure squeezed between a bistro and a *boulangerie* on the Left Bank. Sebastian Blue strolled past it twice before entering, and even then he felt a bit self-conscious about walking through a golden door painted to resemble the sun.

A saffron-robed man with a shaved head approached in the inner hall and asked, "Whom do you seek, stranger?"

"Sol Michael, your leader."

The man bowed slightly. "I am Sol George. Follow me."

He led Sebastian down a dim passage to a stark functional office at the end. The robed man behind the desk rose and extended his hand. "I am Sol Michael. You are Sebastian Blue, from Interpol?"

"Correct. We're working with the French and Turkish police in the matter of your vanished messengers."

The shaved head nodded. Despite the trappings of age, Sol Michael was still a relatively young man—under forty, by Sebastian's reckoning. "What information do you wish?"

"Descriptions and photos of the missing men."

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"Very well. I have them here." He handed over a group photo of a half dozen Apostles, with two heads circled. "Sol Robert, the first messenger, who vanished two weeks ago, and Sol Peter, the second messenger, who disappeared last week."

The men in the picture were young, hardly more than boys, and Sebastian wondered at their being entrusted with such large sums of money. "Did you take precautions after the first disappearance?"

"Certainly," Sol Michael said. "I went myself to the airport and offered incense as the plane took off. I prayed that our god would carry Sol Peter safely to his destination."

"Your prayer wasn't answered."

Sol Michael shrugged. "The ways of the gods are often unclear."

"To whom were the Apostles taking the money?"

"Sol David, keeper of our finances, was awaiting them at Istanbul Airport."

"Would he have recognized them without their robes and shaved heads?"

Sol Michael considered that. "Perhaps not. But I assure you these Apostles were trustworthy!"

"Who's the third man, the one who flies tomorrow?"

"Sol George, who brought you to my office."

"And who arranges the flights?"

"I do, personally. We do not announce them to others in advance, nor do we seek publicity in the press. We are a very private group, Mr. Blue, and we wish to remain so. Part of the money we collect goes for good works here in Paris—food for the poor, homes for the elderly. The portion sent to world headquarters likewise serves a good purpose. Who would steal it?"

Sebastian studied the man's youthful face and decided he was serious. "There are evil men in the world, Sol Michael. But perhaps with luck we can recover your money for you."

The Secretary-General didn't like it. "You plan to be on that plane, flying with the messenger to Istanbul?"

"Exactly, sir. If it happens again, I want to see it happen."

"The plane is a 747, Mr. Blue. It may be difficult to keep your eye on Sol George through the entire trip."

"I'm aware of that," Sebastian said. "I wonder if you could spare that young woman, Laura Charme, for a day or two."

The older man's eyebrows went up. "Might I ask why?"

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"I'd like to arrange for her to be an airline stewardess."

The evening flight to Istanbul was less than half full, and the huge 747 seemed even more mammoth with its rows of empty seats. Sebastian Blue had watched Sol Michael with his stick of incense seeing the third Apostle off. Now he was seated ten rows behind the saffron-robed messenger; Sebastian glanced up occasionally from his magazine to verify that the man was still there.

The Secretary-General had reluctantly arranged for Laura Charme to serve as an extra stewardess on the flight. Moving down the aisle in her trim azure pants suit, she was indistinguishable from the dozen or more other flight attendants. Her job was to help watch Sol George, to assure his safe arrival in Istanbul.

The flight was uneventful as an Italian western movie ground along to its predictably bloody fadeout. Then, as Sebastian glanced up once more from his magazine, he saw the shaved head of Sol George begin to rise. The Apostle got to his feet and started back along the aisle, clutching the leather brief case that held the final third of the money. Sebastian waited only a moment before following.

In the rear of the plane the tourist-class lounge was crowded with passengers. Two trim blonde stewardesses were dispensing beer and pretzels along with conversation in assorted languages. He edged past them and stood by Laura Charme as she filled bowls of nuts for the drinkers. "I do believe you girls are all Swedish."

She glanced up without showing recognition and replied, "Not all. I'm French, and there's a Turkish girl up front."

"Do you enjoy your work?"

"Sure. It's a job."

"Is this the only direct flight from Paris to Istanbul?"

She shook her head and began passing out the bowls of nuts. "There are four each day, though this is the only 747."

When Sebastian was sure no one could overhear, he dropped his voice and asked, "Where is he?"

"In the lavatory. Don't worry."

He glanced at his watch. The trip was well past the halfway mark. In another hour they'd be on the ground. "When he comes out, we may not recognize him."

"He won't get by me," she assured him. "I haven't had that door out of my sight."

Sebastian nibbled on a pretzel. "Been in there quite a while."

She nodded. "Robe in the brief case and wig on the head.

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Shouldn't take so long."

"Think something's happened?"

She eyed the door. "Maybe, but what?"

"Funny if he vanished in there."

"Damn funny! The Secretary-General would never understand."

"Nor would I." Sebastian glanced at his watch. "We'll give him just three more minutes."

"And then?"

"And then we do something."

When three minutes had passed, Laura Charme said, "Well?"

"Come on." Sebastian strode to the narrow lavatory door, checked the *Occupied* sign, and raised his fist to knock.

At that moment the door swung open and Sol George reappeared, still with shaved head and saffron robe, still carrying the brief case. He bowed slightly to Sebastian and edged past him, striding down the aisle to his seat.

"He's still here," Laura said. "Nothing happened to him."

"I'll be damned! I could have sworn that's how the other two vanished."

"Now what?"

Sebastian shrugged. "We wait and see what happens."

The 747 dipped through the night sky toward the beckoning lights of Istanbul Airport, coming in low over the Sea of Marmara. As the wheels touched down, Sebastian Blue checked the shaved head once more and sighed with relief. Whatever had happened to the first two Apostles, this one had arrived safely at his destination.

In the terminal Sebastian watched while Sol George was greeted by another Apostle. "That will be Sol David, the money man," he told Laura Charme when she joined him.

"It was all very dull, Sebastian, though I did enjoy being a stewardess."

"Let me buy you a drink. Put a little excitement into your life."

She nodded agreement, her eyes still on the two retreating figures in their saffron robes. "That would be nice," she said, but her mind seemed elsewhere.

Over drinks at a little table in the Bosporus Lounge, Sebastian asked, "What brought you to Interpol?"

She smiled at him indulgently. "The same thing, I suppose, that brings a Scotland Yard Inspector."

"That's no answer. I'm fat and middle-aged and looking for a change of scene. You're none of those things."

"I'd hardly call you fat, Sebastian." She studied him

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through half-veiled green eyes. "I had a wild childhood, back and forth between a mother in London and a father in Paris. My mother died and I married quite young. My husband was killed in Algeria during the trouble there. He was in the army. Well, having lost both mother and husband while still under twenty, and not caring that much about my father, I was more or less forced to strike out on my own.

"I went back to college and earned my degree in languages. For a time I considered joining the French mission to the United Nations in New York, but finally I decided to stay in Paris and work for Interpol. I've never regretted it, though this is the first time I've traveled for them."

"You've crammed a great deal of life into a few years."

"The years aren't so few. I'm twenty-eight. But what about you, Sebastian? You're much too handsome to have gone unmarried all these years."

He sipped his drink before replying. "My wife divorced me last year and married a chap I worked with at the Yard. The situation became intolerable, at least for me. That's why I came to Paris."

"I'm sorry."

He grinned at her sad expression. "We're just a couple of lost souls." Reaching for the check he said, "We'd better see what's happening with the Apostles of the Sun."

"That man who met Sol George—he seemed vaguely familiar."

"Perhaps you saw him in Paris once."

"Maybe," she agreed, still troubled by it.

As they were leaving the lounge, Sebastian spotted a flash of saffron in the crowd at the far end of the airport. "What's that? One of the Apostles has come back?"

The robed man was standing among the travelers, gesturing to an airline reservations clerk. He was much older than the Apostle who had met Sol George, and his lined face was deep with apprehension.

"What seems to be the trouble?" Laura asked in French.

The Apostle looked from her to Sebastian and then back at the clerk, who explained, "I'm trying to tell him the flight from Paris has been on the ground for almost an hour."

"I was to meet a man," the Apostle said. "He is not here."

Sebastian Blue nodded. "Sol George. We traveled with him from Paris. But he was met by someone else, another Apostle."

"Impossible!" The lined face

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hardened. "I am Sol David, and no one else is authorized to meet the plane! I was delayed by car trouble, but certainly Sol George would not have left the airport without me."

"He did, though," Laura said. "The other Apostle must have told him he was replacing you."

"But the money—"

"Gone," Sebastian said. "Just like the first two."

"That cannot be!"

Laura Charme bit her lower lip. "I just remembered where I saw that man before, Sebastian! Interpol has a file on him. His name is Otto Pucak, and he has a long record in the heroin trade."

"Check the parking lot and see if they noticed his car. I'll go with Sol David to the police. Meet me there in an hour."

She nodded and hurried away. Sebastian gripped the Apostle by the arm and steered him toward the street exit.

The man who faced Sebastian Blue across the desk an hour later was dressed in civilian clothes but had the bearing of a military person. He spoke English quite well, and the first words out of his mouth confirmed the military look. "I am Colonel Hamul. Interpol told me to expect you."

"I understood I was to speak with the regular police."

Colonel Hamul turned over his hand in a gesture meant to be reassuring. "The military works closely with the police here."

"Just what is your interest in the Apostles of the Sun, Colonel?"

He cupped his hands together and leaned back in the chair until the overhead light reflected off his thick glasses. In some ways he reminded Sebastian of the Secretary-General back in Paris. "They are a very wealthy group, you understand. Money flows here from a dozen cities in Europe and the Far East—perhaps as much as a million American dollars each year, if the contributions from Paris are any indication."

"What is done with all that money?" Sebastian asked. "Back in Paris they spoke of charitable work."

Colonel Hamul snorted. "The Apostles of the Sun own a great deal of farming land in the interior of Turkey, mainly east of Afyon. The farms are a major source of opium poppies."

"Then the Apostles are in violation of the law?"

"Not quite." The hands were working again as he sought to explain. "Until a recent agreement with the United States, opium poppies were a major

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crop in Turkey. The price was fixed by the government, which bought up the crop from some two hundred thousand growers. But of course there was always overproduction, with some of the crop diverted to the illegal caravans that crossed into Syria. Right now we are phasing out the opium poppies entirely, with money from the United States, but big growers like the Apostles of the Sun present a problem."

"They won't cooperate?"

Colonel Hamul shrugged. "A great deal of money is involved."

"Let me ask you a frank question. Is the entire cult merely a front for the drug business?"

"Certainly not. I have investigated them quite carefully, and the group is a true religion of sun worshippers—a bit anachronistic but still legitimate."

"Then it's time I talked with Sol David again." Sebastian left the colonel and crossed the hall to a room where Sol David was sitting alone.

"I must return to my congregation," the Apostle said, his voice at once soft and sorrowful.

"Soon. The police will escort you. First, though, I must ask you something else. About the growing of opium poppies."

"Yes, yes," Sol David said with a wave of his wrinkled hand. "When we grew poppies it was legal. Now that it is being ended, we end, too. We do nothing against the law."

"But perhaps someone wants the poppy-growing to continue," Sebastian speculated. "Without this money from Paris, the Apostles could be hard-pressed financially. They might be tempted by any offer of easy money."

"There has been no such offer," Sol David insisted.

"Not yet. The third Apostle was met by a man posing as you. Miss Charme identified him as Otto Pucak, a known narcotics dealer. Have you ever heard the name?"

"Never."

"We can assume the first two messengers were also intercepted by Pucak."

Sol David shook his head. "I was at the airport when the other two planes landed. No Apostle was on either flight. Tonight someone tampered with my car, or I would have been here on time."

"Obviously Pucak tampered with the car to delay you. Somehow he has a link to your organization, a person who tipped him off to the arrival times. Perhaps one of the three messengers, if—"

His words were interrupted

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by Colonel Hamul, who entered carrying a sheet of paper. "This woman, Laura Charme—she came with you?"

Sebastian nodded and glanced at his watch. It was after midnight. "She was supposed to meet me here long before this."

"You had better come with me, Mr. Blue. I fear something has happened to her."

When Laura Charme left Sebastian at the Istanbul Airport, she went first to the parking lot where Otto Pucak would have left his car. The attendant was away, and a shabbily dressed Turkish youth seemed to be collecting the money in his absence. The youth nodded when she described the two men in saffron robes, and for a few French francs he even produced the duplicate parking ticket on which he'd scrawled their license number.

Laura left the lot on the run, clutching the number, and signaled a taxi. She'd spent a weekend in Istanbul the previous summer, and still remembered her way around. The first thing she needed was a telephone.

"Divan Hotel," she told the driver, giving the name of the hotel where they were staying, then settled back in the seat. Of course Pucak could have used a stolen car, but she was gambling he hadn't. She was hoping the license number could be traced before anything happened to Sol George and the money.

After a fast drive along the seaside highway and into the city the driver pulled up in front of the Divan Hotel. She paid him and hurried inside, through a light drizzle of rain that had just begun to fall. Instead of checking the rooms Sebastian had reserved for them, she went at once to the coin telephones in the lobby and called police headquarters. They'd lost an hour on the flight from Paris and now it was almost midnight. The night man on the other end had difficulty understanding her broken Turkish, but when she gave him her Interpol identification number he grew more cooperative.

She read him the auto license number very carefully. "I must have this traced tonight. A man's life may depend on it!"

There was a mumbled consultation on the other end, and the voice said, "We see what we can do. But that office is closed until morning."

"I understand. Look, Sebastian Blue should be there right now, with your chief or someone. Find him, and tell him what I need."

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"Hold on," the voice told her. "We check."

Laura tapped her heel impatiently as she waited. She realized suddenly that she still wore the azure pants suit her stewardess role had demanded. Perhaps there'd be time to shower and change into something else— Then the phone crackled in her ear and the line went dead. She jiggled the hook, but nothing happened.

"Please come with me," a voice said behind her. "Step this way and complete your call in the office."

"Oh?" She glanced at the uniformed bellhop, shrugged, and hung up the dead receiver. As she entered the office he indicated, she saw Otto Pucak, still bald but wearing a business suit now instead of the saffron robe.

Laura whirled, realizing the trap, and caught the bellhop's arm in a judo hold, flinging him against the wall. Pucak barked a quick command in Turkish and as she turned, a man stepped from behind the door and hit her a stunning blow to the side of the head. Her vision blurred and she went down.

Awakening, Laura tried to move her head. Her eyes were closed but not covered, and she was aware at once of movement—the bumpy, jerky movement of a car over the tramlines that stretched almost everywhere in Istanbul's streets. She waited another moment before risking a peek with her left eye, and she saw the postmidnight lights of the city around her. They were crossing Taxim Square, she thought, though she couldn't be certain.

"You are with us again?" a voice asked.

"I—"

"My name is Otto Pucak, but of course you know that. Do not try anything foolish. Your wrists are handcuffed and I have a gun."

She felt the cold restraint of the handcuffs then, and a chill went through her body. "Where are you taking me?"

"North, out of the city." As if to verify his words, the car headed down a slight hill and across the Galata Bridge, leaving the main section of the city behind.

"Are you taking me to Sol George and the other two?" she asked, almost fearing the answer.

"Yes. You shall see them."

There were two men in the front seat, and Pucak rode at her side. Gradually, in the silence that followed, the city lights dwindled and disappeared as they passed through Sisli and into the open countryside. She was too aware that they had

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not bothered to blindfold her, not caring what she saw of their faces or the route. "How did you find me at the hotel?" she asked finally, staring out at the misty rain.

"The boy at the airport was taking his uncle's place. When he told about giving you the license number, the uncle contacted me at once. I already knew you Interpol people had reservations at the Divan, and I took a chance you would go there."

"That's why you didn't bother with a stolen car," Laura surmised. "You knew—or thought you knew—that the lot attendant wouldn't talk."

"We have a well-knit organization," Pucak admitted. "Employees at airports and hotels are especially useful."

They fell silent again, until at last the car came to a stop before a large farmhouse some twenty miles north of the city. "Your place?" Laura asked.

"One of them. The license number would have led you here, had you been able to trace it. Come on."

She climbed out of the car with difficulty, holding her handcuffed wrists before her. "Where is Sol George?" she asked.

The driver, a burly Turk, walked around and unlocked the trunk of the car. She had a glimpse of a saffron robe, and then she turned to see the gun in Pucak's hand, coming up steadily like a waking eye.

After that a great many things happened at once. There was a shouted command from the farmhouse and Pucak started to turn. The burly driver fired one wild shot and there was an answering burst of gunfire from the darkened house. Pucak swung the gun back toward Laura just as a bullet ripped through his middle. She screamed and went down on her knees in the mud as he toppled on his face before her.

And then Sebastian Blue was at her side, holding her, helping her to her feet. "It's all right," he kept saying. "We're here. It's all right now."

"Helicopter," Sebastian told her later. "When Colonel Hamul heard of your call and learned you'd been cut off, he told me at once. We traced the license number and took an army helicopter up here. It was a bit tricky at night, and in this rain, and we had no idea if you'd be here, but it was the only lead we had. We were searching the farmhouse when Pucak drove up."

She was rubbing the marks where the handcuffs had been. "What about Sol George?"

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"He'll live. They only hit him on the head before stuffing him into the trunk. The first two Apostles weren't so lucky, though. We found them buried out behind the farmhouse. I'm afraid that's what he had in mind for you, too."

"How did he get them off the planes?"

"Pucak told us that much before he died. As we suspected, the first one was lured into disrobing and putting on a wig, on the pretense of a plot to steal the money at the Istanbul Airport. Once the first man disappeared, it was easy to convince the second messenger that he, too, should change his appearance on the plane to insure his safety. The first two were told that the waiting Sol David was a thief in disguise. The third Apostle was told nothing, and this time the waiting Sol David really was a thief in disguise!"

"Where do the poppy fields fit in?"

"I have an idea about that. Colonel Hamul is checking some things for me now." He leaned over and brushed a bit of dried mud from her face. "You did quite well tonight."

"What? Getting kidnaped?"

"Getting that license number and leading us to Pucak. You have a certain flair for this work. Besides that you're charming, just like your name."

She grinned at him, a bit impishly. "I'm much more mysterious than that. My name means a charm or spell."

"Whatever it means, I like it. Come on, we have to catch the morning plane back to Paris, and report to Sol Michael."

The sun that greeted them in Paris was a sure sign of spring's arrival. Even Sol Michael seemed in good spirits as he met them at the sunburst door of his temple. "Up there in the sky you see a renewal of all hope," he said, leading them down the hall to his little office. "With our prayers, and with Interpol's aid, I believe the Apostles of the Sun are beginning a period of renewal."

Sebastian seated himself opposite the desk, while Laura took a chair to one side. "You know of course that much of the money sent to Turkey went to farms that cultivated opium poppies?"

Sol Michael nodded slightly. "Until quite recently it was a legal crop there, harvested under government controls."

"And now, Colonel Hamul of the Istanbul police advises me, the farms are to be sold. An offer was made by a company owned by Otto Pucak—and Pucak is the man who hijacked your money. He planned to use

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that same money to buy up some of the Apostles' farmland. Then he would continue growing poppies illegally, avoiding the government ban. Because of the decrease in the illegal traffic his crops would bring an even higher price on the world markets. I'm happy to say Pucak's plot has been crushed."

"You saved us a great deal," Sol Michael said. "But I still do not understand fully the disappearance of the first two Apostles. If they were wearing wigs and regular suits, how did Pucak identify them as they left the plane?"

"One thing they didn't change was their passports. As they passed through customs, one of Pucak's airport people signaled him. He simply waylaid your messengers, representing himself as a true Apostle, and lured them to their death."

"Terrible," Sol Michael muttered. "Are all the murderers now in custody?"

"All but one," Sebastian said, glancing in Laura's direction. "Someone had to inform Pucak the money was coming. Someone had to persuade Sol Robert and later Sol Peter to take off their robes and put on wigs during the flight to Istanbul. Someone they trusted."

"Who?"

"Sol Michael. It was you who made the flight arrangements. You went out there with your incense to pray for safe passage. But to what god did you pray? Would anyone who worships the sun, who fears the darkness of bank vaults, have sent those three messengers on the *evening flight* to Istanbul when three other daily flights were available? You needed the evening flight because it was the only 747, the only plane large enough for them to change appearance and seats without being noticed. *You* sent them to their death, Sol Michael!"

Sol Michael straightened, smiling slightly, and produced a small Berretta pistol from under his saffron robe. "Too clever, Mr. Blue," he said, and then Laura yanked him off-balance and sent him sprawling.

Sebastian grabbed the fallen gun and chuckled with admiration. "That judo of yours can be useful, my dear."

"I thought you'd like it."

"You probably saved my life just then."

"You did the same for me," she said. "Back in Istanbul."

"We seem to be a team."

She smiled. "The Secretary-General might have ideas about that."

Sebastian Blue glanced down at Sol Michael on the floor and reached for the telephone. "Let's ask him, shall we?"

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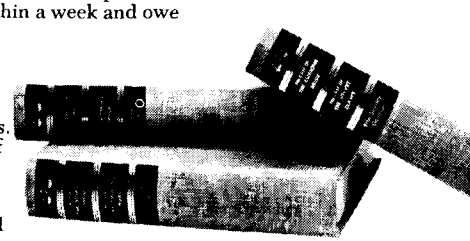

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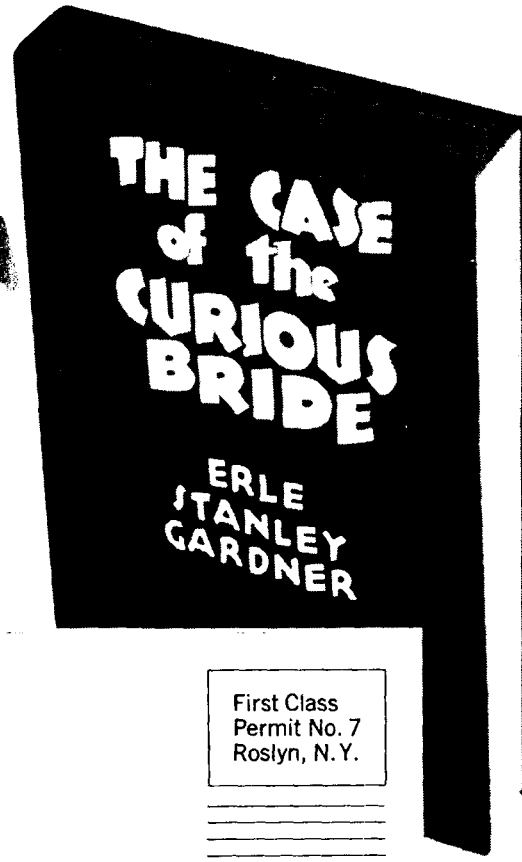

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